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SOME ASPECTS
OF
THE BLESSED LIFE.

BY

MARK GUY PEARSE,

AUTHOR OF "THOUGHTS ON HOLINESS," ETC., ETC.

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NEW YORK:
PHILLIPS & HUNT.

CINCINNATI:
CRAYSTON & STOWE.

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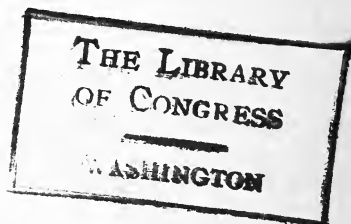
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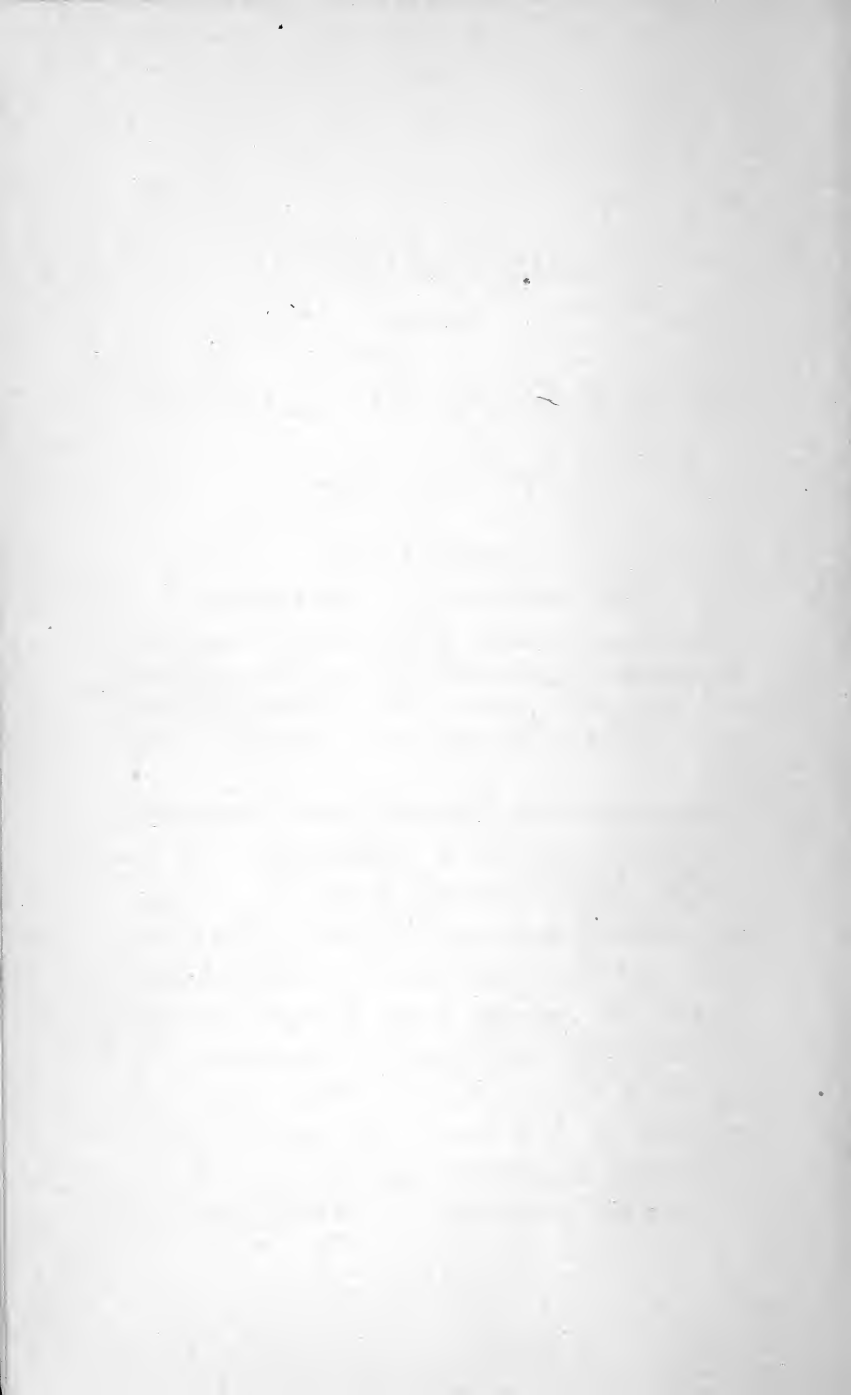
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SOME ASPECTS OF THE BLESSED LIFE.



CHAPTER I.

HOW THE BLESSED LIFE BEGINS.

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful : but his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”—PSALM i. 1, 2.

BLESSED—this is the first word of the book of Psalms, and this is the key-note of all its songs. Here, as frontispiece, is set the picture of the blessed man, and here is the beginning of the blessed life. The after history follows it through many changes, through troubled days and gracious deliverance, until at last it reaches the land where sorrow and sighing are fled away, and, day and night, praise fills the holy temple.

Very full of meaning is the background of

the picture. There are three groups, having little to do with each other yet bound together by dreadful bonds; so that the first group is ever moving on to become the second, and the second goes on in turn to become the third. The first group is of men who are walking and talking; as if of unsettled thoughts and of unsettled ways. The second group stands busied, as if thought and way were now decided and being carried out. Then the company is broken up, and the ungodly who walked in counsel, and the sinners who stood in their ways, sit, each by himself, in the seat of the scorner.

Walking, standing, sitting—these are the three stages; counsel, way, seat—these are the three degrees. Ungodly—without God—this is the first character; sinners—actual transgressors and rebels—this is the second character; the third is the scorner; he ever sitteth alone.

But are there any such hard and rigid lines as these marking off men from each other? There are lights and shades of character; good points that mingle with the evil; is it not the mistake of theology to classify and la-

bel our poor humanity as botanists do their dead and dried specimens? Is not the fact rather that there are infinite varieties and play of circumstances; a thousand influences that help and hinder men in a thousand different ways? Our nature is as various and as changeful as the sea. We look out on it sometimes asleep in the sunshine, and so still that the winds hold their breath as if for fear of waking it, and sometimes black with storm and roaring furiously—a thing so cruel in its rage! Here it creeps up the yellow sands, with curve and glassy edge, and there it thunders on the rocks, with burst of white foam flung against the sky. Yet down beneath the infinite variety—the currents and cross-currents, the waves that sweep onward and the roar and rattle of the backward rush—there is ever, unchanging, resistless, the power of the tide that draws the whole sea hither and thither. So is it that, away beneath the surface varieties of our humanity and force of circumstance, there is the power of the tide that draws us. We have the power to choose, but within that choice are laws which we cannot resist: that thoughts must grow to deeds, and deeds

must strengthen into habits. We may choose our starting-point, but, having chosen it, of this be sure: that the walk makes the way, and the way decides the end. This division of men is an awful fact. The indifferent drift, drawn by the current that sets earthward and downward, going farther and farther away from the shore. The blessed find another power, that draws them upward and Godward.

There are three steps into the outer darkness: *neglecting, rejecting, despising.*

Few things in the language are more powerful than the poem entitled "The Vision of Sin," in which Tennyson tracks some man of splendid gifts along this course and on to the seat of the scorner. Read it; the first part slowly and aloud, so as to feel its music. Then let the soul be caught and swept along with the fierce current of its passionate utterances in the second part. Then comes the third part, a dreary monotone, full only of a cold, black, dreadful scorn—

"A gray and gap-toothed man, as lean as death,
Who slowly rode across a withered heath,
And lighted at a ruined inn, and said :

“ ‘ Fill the cup and fill the can !
Mingle madness, mingle scorn !
Dregs of life and lees of man.’ ”

Then comes the hollow sneer at all things.
And then the vision ends—

“ Below were men and horses pierced with worms,
And slowly quickening into lower forms,
By shards and scurf of salt and scum of dross,
Old plash of rains, and refuse patched with moss.

* * * * *

And on the glimmering limits far withdrawn,
God made himself an awful rose of dawn.”

This is the poetic rendering of the background of the picture. Then thinks the blessed man, as he looks out on these things, “ There surely is another way than that, if I can but find it. God cannot have sent me into the world for that—cannot have put things together so as to make that the inevitable. O for some other counsel, some other companionship, which shall guide my steps into a way of peace ! What strong hand, what wise guide is there ? ” Here he has found the answer—in the word of God. He sits, and upon his face there is thrown a reflected light, that comes from the open book that lies before him ; his delight is

in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. Between himself and these others there comes the *law of the Lord*; an authority mighty, majestic, supreme, yet not a burden or a hardship; his *delight* is in the law of the Lord.

The blessed life grows right up out of the word of God rightly used. The blessed man does not read it only, does not only search it, *he meditates in it day and night*. The law of the Most High God is accepted by him in all the completeness of its claim. And meditating in the word, he finds in turn all that constitutes the foundation of the blessed life. Contact with the solemn presence of Jehovah; a holy fear and reverence before him; a lowly obedience that waits listening to his voice, and heeding it earnestly; a lofty ideal of life in its origin and purpose; a blessed consciousness of an ever-ready help, almighty and most merciful; a vision of holiness, kindling desire and inspiring hope; a brave trust in God as ordering all things; a patient and tender love for all men—these are the gifts and graces that wait for him, gifts which he can find in such rich fullness nowhere else, and which he

can get at in no other way than by meditating in the word.

Of this let us be well assured, that in the blessed life this *meditation is the starting-point*. Whatever we need to see, to know, to be, begins in meditation on the word. In the world a man sees only the point of time we call the present. Away on every hand there lies the infinite, the eternal, but the eye sees only that which it is bent over. The man is in contact only with earth and his neighbors. All the consciousness of mind and heart, all the powers of body and soul, are wrapped about the little business of the day. Hope and desire, which should soar into the heavens, are caged within these bars. To go up the mount of meditation is to pass out of narrow ways and busy tumult up into an ampler, purer air; out of dusty roads to dewy freshness. We begin then to see the true proportions of things. The present is lost, and the eternal unfolds itself. The city sleeps in mists below us, and the great heaven arches us. New faculties begin to unfold themselves in the stillness. There opens within us an eye that sees the unseen, an ear that hears other voices.

And there, as of old, in the cool of the day, comes the very presence of God himself to walk and talk with his child.

He cannot know the blessed life who does not secure for himself this leisure—to be still in God's presence ; to listen and long for his coming ; to give up the soul to communion with him. Religion does not require that we should neglect any business which duty bids us do, rather it commends diligence. But religion does require that we so manage our business as to secure this quiet, earnest, devout meditating in the law of the Lord. Let there be what there may besides this, there can be no substitute for it. Endless religious activities, sermons, services, meetings, missions—these things make this quiet meditation only the more needful. About us on every side are specimens of the religious life that are stumbling-blocks to the world and a perplexity to the Church. A religious life always on the verge of extinction ; a living death ; without any regular meals or “ visible means of support,” it exists on scraps and crusts picked up anywhere ; it clothes itself in such scanty clothing as it can find ; it stands shivering,

looking wistfully in at the world's fire, glad to warm itself when no one is looking, or when those about it are not too particular ; trying to snatch a little comfort as it lingers on the verge of the world's pleasure. It is the religious life without any strong, habitual, wholesome meditation in the word. Again, there is a very common religious life that is for the most part peevish, querulous, grumbling ; wholly selfish, it is utterly incapable of any brave endurance, of any patient self-denial, without strength or beauty. It is the religious life that craves for stimulants. It lives on religious excitement — tears, thrills, raptures. This, too, is the religious life without either the milk or the strong meat of the word ; it never meditates in the law of the Lord. We cannot lay too much stress upon it—we cannot too earnestly impress it upon ourselves. If this quiet, earnest, habitual meditation be lacking, we can know nothing of the blessed life. If this be ours, then is the blessed life begun.

And do not let us think of this exercise as only a foundation on which we build. Much more than that—it is as the sap of the soul.

Meditation carries the purifying and repairing forces of the word throughout the whole nature. "Now ye are clean," said the Lord to his disciples; "now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." The word of God cleanses the thoughts and the motives and the imagination. No life is lower or more hopeless than his in whom every sight is made to minister to a foul imagination. And, on the other hand, few shall walk the earth more safely than they whose minds are hung about with pure visions; within whose crystal walls there entereth nothing that defileth or maketh unclean. Let meditation be the limner whose hands shall set in glowing colors the scenes of God's word about the "chambers of the imagery."

Note further, that this meditation is not reverie—dreaming. It is so thinking about God, and so searching for him in the word, that it soon passes into the glow and blessedness of communion with him. We may venture, I think, to alter the word, and say: "His delight is in the love of the Lord, and in his love doth he meditate day and night." Sweet and hallowed companionship is ours with that best

Friend and dearest Brother, who walks and talks with us whenever we meditate upon his word. Not alone we sit. "I will come unto you," is his promise. And this is the appointed place; here he bids us wait and look for himself. Beside this stream, whose waters make glad the city of God, and underneath this tree of life, is his trysting-place. And in that presence to lose the loneliness of life; to forget the fear and weakness; to have him as our own; to find the mind illumined as he opens the understanding; to find the promises so rich, and full, and personal, and present, as he opens the word; and to have the faith emboldened till, like John, it leans on his bosom, and, with Thomas, calls him "My Lord and my God;" to have in him the past hushed—a holy calm which no voice of condemnation breaks; to have in him the future all lit up with the glow of heaven's sunny distance; to find the love of all the heart drawn out and satisfied in him: this is blessedness indeed. So comes the blessed life.

"He shall be like a tree." The word tree has the same source as the word truth—that which stands and abides. The blessed man

is he who has got something to hold on with—and he has got something to hold on to. “A tree planted.” The roots are wrapped about the stones. The principles have taken hold of God’s everlasting truth. The ungodly are like the chaff—there is neither rest nor resting-place—whirled hither and thither, now up into the heavens, now trampled into the mud. O, the calm of the blessed man! It may blow a hurricane, tossing the branches, sweeping the leaves, but the roots hold to the rocks. Where else can a man find the Abiding, and the Almighty, and the Authority that can give him so settled and sure a hold as this? The word of the Lord abideth, and abideth for ever. Blessed indeed is it, amid the shifting things of life, its trembling uncertainties, its fleeting shadows, to get on to the granite of God’s own truth for a foundation. “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water”—not only firmness and strength shall he find here; not a commandment only, but a promise; not only a law, but that which ministers to life. The word is a refreshment, a secret source of nourishment. Fierce heats may beat, and summer droughts may linger

long, but the river of God is ever full of water.

“He bringeth forth his fruit in his season.” A man suited for the times, who hath hope for the spring-time, and joy for the summer, and peace for the autumn, and patience for the winter. Like trees whereon the many grafts present a variety of fruits, some late, some early, he bringeth forth gentleness and brave faith, and all the year round the golden fruit of love and praise. This meditation on the word is the secret of blessedness. Strength, stability, and gentleness are the sure outcome of it.

And beginning with the presence of God in the word, he goes forth to find that presence in the world, to find that “law of the Lord” every-where and in every thing. God’s voice meets him in the business and hallows it. His presence is felt in the pleasure, and his great law of love encompasses him with favor as with a shield.

“His leaf also shall not wither.” The tree has two ends, root and leaf. The root that abides unmoved in every season—firm as the ground in which it sets its hold; and the leaf-

end, sporting with the sunshine, dripping with the showers, whispering to the breeze, swayed by the lightest breath. The principles are the roots—they never yield ; but the blessed man has a thousand interests and sympathies with a thousand passing things—politics, pleasures, friendships, children ; and because the root is by the river, the furthest leaf is green ; because the principle is fixed, the outermost thing of life shall feel its wholesome power, and be kept in health and beauty.

“ Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” The blessed man is ever a prosperous man, a rich man—the richest. He possesses who enjoys. He possesses who turns to truest account the opportunities of life. Sit down and think of an ideal prosperity. Is it not a calm, settled, contented life, without the madness of remorse, without consuming fear? Prosperity is his who has had the breath of God breathed over him with his “ peace, be still.” The spirit of God has brooded over him, and hushed the storm, and ended the confusion, and brought light and rest and gladness.

In hope, in enjoyment, in memory, in sure confidence, a rich and prosperous man is he ;

one whom kings might envy. Putting a conscience into his work, too, and doing least things as unto God, what he does shall be well done, and his work shall prosper.

So he goes along his way as one having dominion; walking the earth with a firm step, knowing whose world it is, and whose hand leads him, and whither he is going. He knows God's law, and God knows his way, and in that knowledge is the very center of rest, and the secret of Heaven's own blessedness.

CHAPTER II.

MEDITATION ILLUSTRATED.

THE blessed man whose portrait is given to us in the first Psalm *meditateth* in the law of the Lord. He does not read it only, does not content himself even with searching the Scriptures. That is the process of getting in at the life of the word, and getting the word into the life. Food has in itself a power of imparting vigour to our whole bodily nature: to the brain, and it thinks; to the eye, and it sees; to the heart, and it renews its far-reaching force. So the word is the "sincere milk," the "strong meat," which is able to minister to the whole of our spiritual life—to faith and love and peace and joy and service. But before the food can feed us we must get in at its essence, and must get its essence into us; this is the purpose of digestion and assimilation. We have to pass the word through a similar process, and this process is meditation.

Let us turn to the first chapter of Genesis and the first verse—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Now we have read our verse, what shall we do with it? He who reads the Bible, and nothing more, has done what he thinks to be his duty. Let him go on his way; he will come to-morrow wondering where he read; was it the first verse, or was it the second? And he will often wonder how it is that he gets so little good from reading the Bible. It would save time and trouble—certainly it would save his doubts as to the place—if he were to look at the blank page at the end of the book, or even at the covers only. But people cannot feed themselves by looking into the baker's window.

Better far than reading is searching, even if it is nothing more than taking the marginal references and turning to them. We may read without thinking, and often do. But in searching the Scriptures we get the word at least further in than our eyes. When we begin to search we transfer that for which we are looking into the thought.

But searching industriously and dutifully

may be a very dull, hard, dead exercise. A man may walk in Paradise itself, doing nothing else but busily botanizing, geologizing, collecting beetles, arranging and classifying, pressing or pinning his specimens. Our coming into Paradise is for something much better and more blessed than all that. We come in the cool of the day, watching and listening eagerly for Him who walketh there, and who calleth for his child. Then in his presence we breathe its pure air, we rest in its delicious shade, we eat its fruit, and in that waiting upon the Lord we renew our strength.

We do not use the word aright until it becomes to us the very gate of our Father's house, through which we enter in the celestial city, into the very presence of the king. "These are they which testify of me," saith the Lord. God's word cannot be a dead word—a mummied history, a fossil. The breath of God must make it immortal. But we need the anointed eye, the opened ear, the understanding heart. So need we ever pray for this same moving of the Spirit of God upon us; then light ministers to life and develops it.

Do not be discouraged if at first the exercise seems hard, and not so rich in profit as you hoped. The art of meditating, like every other art, has to be learned. The process of reading, now so easy that you are unconscious of any effort in it, was once a tough matter of mastering mysterious signs ; of stumbling over troublesome letters, with tears, and fears that you would never be able to read as others could. The work is surely worth the effort. Here, indeed, the diligent soul shall be made fat.

And do not suppose that meditation requires a long time alone. It must begin away in the inner chamber, alone with God. But thus begun, our thoughts will go on dwelling on the word, finding new truth and sipping fresh sweetness from it. Yet meditation is not study, nor is it dreaming. It is that passive condition in which we open the doors and windows of the soul to the blessed influences that gather about us when we sit with the book before us and wait for the coming of the Lord. Meditation is not an act of the mind only, but of the whole man—so that the word stirs thought, and thought stirs prayer, and prayer

passes into communion, and communion reveals new matter for meditation.

As a specimen of meditating in the word, let us turn to the passage we have chosen: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." So all begins with God, at once and immediately. Not from nature up to God am I to move, but from God down to nature. And so at the outset the word demands my faith. There is but one attitude for studying this first verse of Genesis, as for studying any part of the Scriptures; sitting with meekness, receiving the word with faith. Turn to the record of the triumphs of faith in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. They begin here. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God." It is the same faith that works the wonders that follow in the chapter—the faith that finds its source in Jesus Christ himself, "The Author and Finisher of our faith."

It may seem at first sight as if it needed no faith to believe that God created the heaven and the earth. "Of course," you say, "we all believe that some one must have made it all, and that some one is God." No,

you cannot find God thus—our gracious and loving Father. All you have got in that way is a far-off logical necessity, a great first cause, invented to complete the circle of our reasoning. That is not God. I cannot kneel down to that first cause of things and speak to him. And not even logically does the supposition of that first cause satisfy me. I find it as easy to think of eternal matter as of eternal spirit. No, we cannot by any such searching find out God. We make a mistake which has cost us very much when we come down from the high ground of our faith and say, "Yes, for spiritual things faith is needful, but in nature we can find God by reason." Here, as every-where else, we can only find him by faith.

Look at it as an historical fact. Have men ever received the story of the creation of the world by God except where faith has led them? They who lived so much nearer the beginning of things, who saw the freshness of the Creator's touch on his handiwork, went away after a host of gods that they themselves had invented—logical first causes. The fathers of science and the founders of the arts

stumbled at this fact because they understood it not by faith.

But to us, to whom the Father has been revealed, how good it is to sit at his feet and to listen as he tells us of the beginning of things ! So, except we become as little children, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God here or elsewhere.

Yet do not think for a moment that reason has no place in this art of meditation. They sin against God and against themselves who cast reason forth as one that mocketh. Reason can trace God, though only faith can find him. It is needful ever that reason go forth with faith, dwelling upon the tokens of his presence, showing the forces and beauties of creation ; the wisdom and contrivance, the vastness and wonder. Reason can correct the interpretation that faith puts on her Lord's words ; but faith is ever the chosen bride to whom the King revealeth himself. Reason, like an old, wise tutor, goeth with faith, and teacheth her to see new meanings in the King's words ; new wonders in his gifts ; new graces in his dealings ; new glories in his character. But faith alone carries the sweet

secret of the King's favor. Faith saith of him, he is mine.

And as the story of the creation claims our faith, so it has a special help and blessing for our faith.

“God created the heaven and the earth.” See then, my soul, the completeness of his authority over thee and all things. We count that to be our own which is dependent upon our bounty or on our care, and we claim its service. We call that ours which we have bought with our money, or which we have fitted for our use. But how infinitely above all that is the proprietorship of the Creator! Look up to him! How completely am I thine, O God, who created me and all things on which I depend! Thine is my being, my every power thine. Thine is the air I breathe; the light by which I see; the food I eat; the clothes I wear. I walk upon thy earth, and thy hands uphold me and minister to me in ten thousand ways. Assert thy claim to me, for I would be wholly thine, and thine in every thing.

“God created the heaven and the earth.” So, then, I am a God-made man in a God-made

world. My soul, give thanks that the devil had no finger in the making of any thing. Do not be afraid of the world now; thy Father made it, and he can give thee grace to use it rightly and have dominion over it. Do not be afraid of thyself, for thou too art his handiwork. The devil did but put out of joint and service what God had made. What a contrast is the great utterance of this verse with the meanness and poverty of the tempter's first appearance in the next chapter but one! Lift thyself up, then, God's own, with nothing within thee, nothing about thee, but that which he can hallow and sanctify and use. He who made us at the first understands us, and can set us right with ourselves and with all things, and can keep us right; therefore let all that is within us bless his holy name.

"God created the heaven and the earth." O, my soul, what greatness, what safety, what blessedness are thine! He who made all things is thy Father, and thou art his child. Think of his great power who setteth the sun in the heavens; and he careth for thee! Think of his wisdom and of his love, who

arrangeth, controlleth, satisfieth all things. Go forth bravely into the world, knowing that the center of all things is thy Father; God—their source and strength. Therefore, my soul, thou hast no room to fret or fear; thou canst but trust and love and praise.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” So all begins—with God. What despair had settled upon the earth if she turned elsewhere than unto God! Here is the great, black, shapeless earth, without form and void. A waste of waters, wrapped in darkness, tossed in ceaseless storm, without a ray of light, without a breath of life, a blot upon creation.

Think of this desolate earth, looking away to some sister world, and hearing of its fairness—brilliantly shining, decked with beauty, where trees and flowers and rippling brooks make up a paradise, where happy life sports on the land, and through the air and sea. Earth turns to herself, where through the dreadful darkness the waves sweep restlessly, and wild winds moan as if God had forsaken her. What hope is there for her? Can she bid a sun to shine? Can she set the water's

bounds, or bring in the mystery of life; wondrous and teeming life? "No hope," moans the poor earth, looking forth into its darkness. Stay, earth! God, the almighty God, bends over thee. He decked thy sister worlds with beauty, and made them what they are. He can speak, and lo, all thy dreary waste shall become a paradise.

Ah! so do we despair if we look within! All is dark, empty, desolate. Restless in our fierce desires, haunted with a sense of deep wants, what can we do? We look away at the great lights above us. "Ah," we sigh within ourselves, "if I were only like such a one; so good, so noble, so devoted! But within me, alas, all is so cold, so dark, so empty!" Stay; for thee, my soul, God has revealed his will—his purpose. He comes to put forth his gracious power within us, that we may become complete and perfected—made like unto the Son of God himself.

In the beginning God—Is God with us? Then where shall we set the limits of our hope? What are the bounds of his blessing? Who shall say to the tide of his mercy,

“Thus far and no farther?” Let our beginning begin with God.

Think, again, how this void and formless world appeals to its Creator. In the beginning he had created it, with its vast capacities and stores of minerals and wealth. Could he leave it unfinished—without use or beauty, a flaw in the great universe? Mutely it looked up to heaven, dumbly praying, almost upbraiding the hand that made it: “Wilt Thou, who hast begun to fashion me, fling me off forlorn, deserted—a thing at which thine enemies may mock, a thing to beget bewildering doubts among the very angels—as if thou hadst begun to build, and wearied of thy work or wert not able to finish it?”

And so, my soul, canst thou appeal to God: “Hast thou made us, O thou all-perfect Worker? Hast thou made us for thyself, in thine own image and likeness? And now, is it all to end in this poor round of eating, drinking, working, sleeping? Is there nothing more for us than this being plagued by past failure, burdened with care, worried by the future? Is there to be no light, no beauty, no gladness of life?”

So may my want and emptiness plead with God ; finding in themselves a promise, a claim, a prophecy of what our God is going to do for us. Only let us give ourselves right up to him, to let him have his own way with us, and then be quite sure of this : every kindling of noble desire, every thrill of great possibility, every flow of splendid hope, every dream of brave endurance and triumph, points on to what we shall be—somehow and somewhere. All things in heaven, all things on earth, all the moments, and memories, and influences, and hope within us, *all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose ; for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

And yet again : In all the processes of creation God saw the paradise that should be.

We think again of the poor earth, amid all the fires that wrought about her ; *the wild winds that howled and moaned over the lonely waste, as if no eye watched them, no hand could subdue them ; great seas that swept and thundered furiously, like things that none could tame ; fierce fires that wrought within,

fusing the solid rocks ; earthquakes that rent the hills, and forces that flung up the mountains, a thousand giant hands that tore and dug the troubled earth to its very center. "I dreamed of paradise," it mutters very sadly, "and instead of that here is confusion only—destruction rampant every-where. Better surely that I had slept on than wake up to be the sport of all these cruel things—finding no rest day or night."

But far on God saw the paradise that should be. It stood out clear before him, with grassy slope and fruitful grove, with flowers scenting all the air, and happy songs of birds ; with shining river, and the docile creatures, and all things above and below attesting that the earth was full of the glory of God. Then came the blessed Sabbath—God's rest and earth's.

Ah ! the great Creator has his forces still, of pain and grief, of loss, of the mysteries of evil and grim death. Fear not, my soul. He directs, he controls, he shapes. Only let Him have his own way perfectly. He sees where all things lead. He knows what they all do, these great forces of his, by which he prepares

the new heaven and the new earth, and those who are to dwell therein.

Is there not in this early history of man a trace of sadness, almost of failure? "It repented the Lord that he had made man. It grieved him at his heart." Then, gradually, the shadow begins to pass away. There comes in a tone more jubilant and hopeful, growing steadily until it reaches that exultant outburst, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill toward men." Then breaks out the enthusiasm of humanity, and all leads straight on and up to the splendor of the triumph and coronation of the Apocalypse. Of course, with God there is no past, no future; yet it does seem as if the coming in of the Son of man brought this new tone of hope. In this, my soul, be ever glad.

Amid all the rebellion and degradation and failure of our humanity, there stands before God the finished, perfect, proper man. Down here the All-seeing looks on the stunted, dishonored, ruined work of his hands; here is appalling sin, and greed, and cruelty, and miserable strife, and senseless pride, and foul lust, and horrible brutality. But there, at his

right hand, there stands the other Man—the Man Christ Jesus—God's hope and satisfaction. And thus ever before him is the glorious token and promise of what our poor humanity can be. There is the pattern Man, and now every force in the world and all the grace of God is at work to shape us in his glorious image and likeness. Therefore, my soul, let God have his own way with thee perfectly, exulting in this our sublime hope—"We shall be like him ; for we shall see him as he is."

CHAPTER III.

FORGIVENESS.

THE THIRTY-SECOND PSALM.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

THIS is the second *blessed*. Thank God, there are two. The first tells of the man who keeps out of sin—“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” In this the blessed man stands up on the sunny heights, up where birds sing and the sweet scent of flowers fills the air, and he is looking down into the black bed of the river; over the steep precipices and jagged rocks, and past black hollows, down into the oozy river-bed. He shudders as he thinks of that depth and peril; “Blessed is the man who is far up above that, in safety and gladness,” saith he. If there were but one

“blessed” then must we despair. There is another; listen to the music: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” This is the other height of the river. He stands and looks down into the black and dreadful depth, “I had gone down there, down in its peril; but lo! Thou hast taken me up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and thou hast set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings, and thou hast put a new song into my mouth, even of praise and thanksgiving.” These two heights stand on either side of sin like the law and the gospel; Sinai and Calvary.

My brother, if the first blessedness cannot be ours—the blessedness of those who have kept the law—thank God, the second may. We may get up there; into the sunlight and the golden glory and the singing of birds. This is the whole meaning of the gospel. The very heart and essence of all that God has done for us in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ is this: to restore us who have fallen to the blessedness of this great deliverance, to the joy of a full salvation.

Here are three things for us to look at :

The man who sits here.

The way he got here.

The blessedness he found here.

1. The man who sits here. Those who do not know sometimes think this blessedness is for good people who have always been good ; people who call themselves sinners as a matter of course, because it sounds religious and is the proper thing to say, but they really have never done any harm ; gentle and loving and pure souls, who seem not to be plagued with ill-tempers and foul sins like others are. Ah ! look well at this man. Why, his soul is all notched and scarred with the wounds of many a fierce fight. He has sunk down into the black depths of sin as very few have ever done. He has sinned against light, and amid opportunities and advantages such as very few have ever had. Here is a man in whom sin burned like a fire of hell and set his soul in a blaze ; a man who to the fierceness of his passion added a cool, calculating, cold-blooded, murderous arrangement for his crime that aggravated its horror a thousand times.

No man this of gentle angel spirit, from whom

you turn half-angry and half-envious—"One of your saints. He does not know how I feel." Here is a man who has gone down as low into sin as any could go, and into sins as black and foul; and yet this is he who sits on this sunny height and sings of the blessedness of those whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is covered. Blessed be God! if this man has got there none need despair.

And does somebody begin to think—"Just so; this is one of your dreadful sinners whose life has blinded him to the horribleness of sin, and now, scarcely able to discern between right and wrong, with no standard above his own life, lightly forgetting what has been, he can rush in, untroubled, where angels fear to tread, and boast aloud of all kinds of privileges and possessions?" No, indeed. Come near and listen to him. He knows not the sweets of forgiveness who has never known a bitter sorrow for sin. See how David heaps up words to tell what he thinks of it. It is a transgression—a going out of the way. It is a sin—a mistake, a missing the mark. It is iniquity—an injustice, a wrong. It is guile—a cheating, a lie. Here on the height of forgive-

ness, right under the Cross, he sees sin thus. He looks back and sees sin as a going out of the way. He stepped over the boundary; it was only a step, he thought he could easily come back again; he would not go far, only just to see what was over there. So it began and so it went on; day after day thoughts growing into acts, acts into habits, habits ever growing stronger.

Then some day the man wakes. Where is he? Clinging to the face of the precipice, he looks up. O, how different that way of the Lord appears now! He used to think of it as a restriction, a being too particular. But now he wakes to find innocence lost—all that might have been left behind—and the man who was going to be free is the helpless slave of his own sin. And he cannot get back; cannot get up again. What memories crowd about him! Thoughts in which God's way appears a way of pleasantness and all his paths as peace. O, the dewy freshness of that life, the blessed safety, the bright hopes, the good purposes! A man cannot go far in sin without finding that he has gone out of his way. And he cannot get back again;

he cannot climb up ; and down below there is that dreadful darkness and destruction.

So sin misses the mark. The man thought this way led to happiness. Ah ! hell itself seems to laugh out its hideous mockery at him. Happiness—hanging here on this giddy height, and down there that awful darkness !

And here he sees sin as an iniquity, a wrong, a robbery. God has created me, fitted and fashioned me to know him, to love him, to serve him. Life, reason, every faculty, the air I breathe is his, the light I see by, the earth I tread upon ; then has my whole life been a robbery. I have set myself—myself, who am his—to be my own lord and master. I have used these things as if they were mine—a wrong added to immensely by the great love of our God toward us and by his generous purposes concerning us. Sin is a robbery. It is a hard word, but it is true. We rob God of his own. We rob the earth of the good example and influence that we were sent to give it. We rob God and man of love and truth and of all things blessed. We turn the very faculties and gifts which he has given into the weapons with which we sin against him. O,

sin is a hateful thing and must have an awful ending somewhere! Nor is this all. Sin is a guile. It is a cheating, a lie. It is not only itself a deceiver, it is a deception.

And yet, thank God, this is the man who comes to sit on this sunny height and sing of the blessedness of sin forgiven.

2. How he got here.

He had tried to get up to this height by the wrong path and failed.

He had tried to hush up and cover his sins. I kept silence, he says. He tried to put on a jaunty indifference, as if it were nothing at all. He was no worse than others. If there was any blame it was not his. Blame his nature if you will, in which such fiery passions slept—he could not help that. Blame occasion and temptation; these were answerable for what happened, not himself. But underneath that silence his very bones roared. No, he could not get rid of sin by denying it. There it was, in all its hideous nakedness, standing out glaring in the light of God. Memories met him and whispered at his ear. Faces rose up and came near and looked at him, dumbly clamoring against him. Fingers pointed at him.

Nature seemed allied with conscience, and as he passed there came strange voices, looks, hints, whispers, evil omens, as if all the world knew all about it and shrank from this dreadful man. He knew within himself that he was another man, fallen, degraded, as if the Hand that tamed the evil things within him had been taken off. Above him was a God whom he feared to face. Beneath him was a blackness which he shuddered to think of; for in every man's heart sin means hell; assuredly it can mean nothing else. No, he could not bury his sin; as in that weird and tragic story in which the poet tells of the man who tried to bury his crime, but the black pool would not hide the secret, and there, in the dried-up river-bed, lay the victim. The winds swept away the leaves and flung the dead again into sight. We have no power to undo the past; we cannot hush it up. Its voices go on and on, forever clamoring against us. We cannot bury it. It rises and pursues us. This height of blessedness cannot be reached by this path. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring."

And yet you ask, perhaps, Does sin always

mean that—anguish, and fear, and remorse? No, not always—not always. Only as long as the light of God is within the soul and the voice of God speaks to the man. That light may be put out. That voice may be silenced. And then the man shall come to laugh a wild, untroubled laugh at these things. Right and wrong have ceased to mean any thing. Love is lust and truth is but a name ; and purity is but a hypocrite who wears a white robe ; and friendship is only the disguise of selfishness. O, better a thousand times the madness that raves at the memory of sin than that. The eye that sees the truth is put out, the ear that hears the voice of God is stopped. Then the soul can go untroubled, unburdened. There is a life on earth so dark, so cold, so dead, so unconscious, so incapable of any moral sense that I would sooner crave the very fires of hell to create within me some sense of right and wrong than sink into that worst of deaths, that deepest of damnations. No, no, indeed, *that* path cannot lead up to this blessedness.

And now he points out to us the path by which he got up here. “ I acknowledged my sin unto Thee ; I said, I will confess my trans-

gressions unto the Lord." There was the starting-point, and much more than that; he gave right in to God. That is every thing. Giving right in; throwing off all excuses and honestly and earnestly going to God and telling him all about it, that is the first step, and a long way up toward this blessedness. Why, David had worn his very religion as a cloak to cover up his sin. Throughout one dreadful year David came and went to the Temple services; he knelt and confessed sin in formal words with the rest of the congregation; he stood and saw the sacrifice offered; he watched the priest bearing the blood within the veil; he waited as the priest came forth again and spake the word of absolution; but underneath the cloak of his religion he carried the guilty secret, and all his soul was parched and consumed with a desert heat. No dew of blessing fell on him, no balm soothed his wounded spirit. God can do nothing with us when we come and go thus before him. We must give right in. Have you noticed it in the story of Ahab? There was none like Ahab, saith the story, who did sell himself to commit wickedness. But frightened once

by the threatening of the Lord, alarmed by the tone and manner of the prophet of fire, he put on sackcloth and went in before the Lord and walked humbly. Swift and glad then came the words from the Lord: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself? The evil shall not come in his time." When we cast away excuses, explanations, apologies, falling at his feet with the cry, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," then God, our gracious and loving Father, can let the fullness of his love flow forth to us; then he can fall upon the neck and bring us home with rejoicing; then all the great preparation and provision of his mercy is our own.

This is more than the first step; it is every thing. If we thus give in to God he will teach us and lead us in the way we should go. He will unfold to us the mystery of repentance. He will lift up the hand of our faith. He will reveal to us the great love of Calvary. He will bring us up to this height of blessedness until we too sit and sing in adoring wonder and joy, compassed about with songs of deliverance.

3. Let us see what else David found here besides forgiveness. The psalm does not end with singing about forgiveness; there is a very different strain, and a very different subject, immediately and almost abruptly introduced.

But, note well, the psalm does begin with forgiveness. Whatever else there may be for us it begins with that; in knowing that our transgression is forgiven and our sin is covered, and in knowing it with such a knowledge that we can sing of it with a triumphant joy. We must know that as surely as David did. You and I stand looking out into eternity with its great realities—the glories of heaven and the dreadful mystery of hell. In matters like this we must have more than an uncertain hope. I am not sure that God has given me any thing until I am quite sure that God has, for Christ's sake, forgiven my sin. Whatever else God may have for us must begin with that—a conscious forgiveness. And if David found this in the twilight of his time I may be sure of finding it in the blaze of Gospel noon. Come boldly and ask for it. Tell God that you cannot live without it. This blessedness is no vague thought; no logical

conclusion ; no inference ; it is a blessed persuasion, wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us, that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. It is the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. It is the revelation of the loving Father to the hearts of his children.

And notice, again, that whatever else David found here he makes very much of forgiveness. Do not let us ever come to think of forgiveness as a little or a light thing. Think what it means—the infinite sacrifice on the part of our Father, God, the gift of his Son, his only Son, the well-beloved. Think how it comes to us at no less a cost than the shame and agony and dreadful curse of our Lord and Saviour. It is ever God's unspeakable gift—such a declaration of love, of condescension, of suffering, of deliverance, as must always amaze and overwhelm us.

But though David begins with forgiveness, and makes very much of it, yet he does not end there. We may avail ourselves of this *selah* at the end of his song about forgiveness. It means, "Let us meditate here ; be still and think of these things." And there is

room for meditation. It seems as if we are such poor, foolish, dim-eyed creatures that giving prominence to any truth, however important, is apt to hide from us other truths, and so we run into mistake. This grand and glorious doctrine of forgiveness—conscious, assured, triumphant forgiveness—which cannot be made too prominent, even it is apt to mislead unless we put a *selah* here. We must look into the truth carefully and look around it circumspectly. Young people, perhaps especially, hearing this doctrine of conversion insisted upon so often, are apt to think of it as such a mighty change that, even though they love and trust and serve Christ, yet they scarcely dare think of themselves as converted. Most certainly this is no reason why it should not be preached with the utmost plainness and urgency, but it is a reason why we should guard this point. Salvation is in Him ; not in convulsions or earthquake ; not in terror or agonies ; not in swift and tremendous transformations. We have only to come to Christ and let him save us in his own way. Forgiveness is at the foot of His cross. Never mind how you were brought there—that is his work, not yours.

Then, again, this insistence upon forgiveness is apt to make others think that it is every thing; that when they have found that they have found all that there is; there is nothing else left to think about or to desire. So is it that there are not a few who seem to make their whole religious life only a memory of their conversion; that silenced every fear, that entitled them to every hope. Instead of living right out from that point the great, full, wealthy life of God, they are just content to draw a small percentage of peace and comfort from the recollection of their conversion. Beware of this mistake. Forgiveness is but the entrance-gate to the height and depth of blessedness that waits for us. We are not to sit in the porch, lame and begging; we are to get up in Christ's name and go on, leaping and praising God, right into the holy temple.

Then there are others who, hearing so much and so often of forgiveness, think they must come to God for that, and having that they must get on as well as they can, striving in their own strength to be as holy as they can. In this sense of it there is no such word as try in the Bible. God takes hold of our try and

makes it trust. Forgiveness is the beginning of a life of faith, and it is faith right on, step by step, and right up to the very end.

And yet again, there are others with whom forgiveness means feeling happy. It is theirs if they can sing aloud, but it dies with the music. If they hear a sermon that stirs the soul and glows within them, then they think they are saved; but when to-morrow's dullness comes they droop and fear. This is to turn things exactly upside down. David felt happy because he was forgiven, but he was not forgiven because he felt happy. Here now the singing is hushed, but his forgiveness has not passed away with the song. Joy is the flower and fruit of faith, but faith is not dead because the flower falls off sometimes; joy, of necessity, wears itself away, and the springs of its renewal are not in us but in Christ, and we must go out of ourselves to find them.

Now in his stillness, as David sits on the Mount of Blessedness, let us try to get at his thoughts. It is only when we have tasted the sweets of forgiveness, only when we have seen the great fullness of the love of God, that the

deeper springs of repentance are unsealed within us. With eyes purged and a heart made tender we see then what sin means—what a dreadful reality it is. With every faculty touched and thrilled with the consciousness of God's great love to him David turns to think of himself. He recalls the passions that sleep within him—the dreadful possibilities of evil, so fierce, so revengeful. He thinks of the temptations that beset him—the strength of the world, the weakness of the flesh, the craft of the devil—and there sweeps over him a horror more black and dreadful than any hell. "O! can I ever come to grieve that love again!"

Well may he be hushed. And all his soul goes out in great longing for something more than forgiveness. He, with his passionate nature melted by the goodness of God, feels that the very gift of his forgiveness has brought another, deeper want—a want that every forgiven heart must know. "I want, O my God, never, never, never to grieve thee again. And yet I am weakness itself, and all my way is full of hinderances!"

And again he sits in silence and looks forth

from the height of blessedness upon the way of his life. With tearful eyes he traces it and sees now that it has all been a transgression, a going out of the way, a constant wandering. He had cried, "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, then will I teach transgressors thy ways." But now, ignorant, foolish, crushed by the blunders and mistakes of life, he is smitten through and through with a sense of helplessness, and he feels only how much he himself needs to be taught. How can he go forth again? He is afraid to step lest he should go astray; so impulsive, so rash, so swept away by the feeling of the moment, with temptations that surge and storm about him.

Then he lifts up those eyes of his and sighs from the overfull heart, "I want more than forgiveness, Lord; forgiveness is a gift I cannot keep. I want deliverance, guidance, teaching, help, every thing!"

And then God bends over him tenderly and speaks with an infinite love—"Child, thou dost want Me, and I will never leave thee. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye."

There, that is where forgiveness brings us ; into his presence, into such close intimacy, into such heart-communion with him. The great Jehovah, the Lord of heaven and earth, comes to us in gracious compassion as our helper and friend, our teacher and guide. The Cross of Christ is at the threshold of his banqueting chamber, whither he bringeth us, and his banner over us is love. Here we enter into the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Until then God is either afar off—a mere catechism definition, a logical necessity as the great First Cause of all things—or else he is the dreadful Judge against whom we have sinned. But now, in this height of forgiveness, he himself cometh to us ; he speaks to us ; he holds us dear to himself, and we look up with a new, glad confidence, and cry, Father ! This is the sweetest joy, the fullest blessedness, the richest privilege that waits for us on the Mount of Forgiveness—this heart-communion with God. And this is the purpose of our forgiveness. We, who were sometime afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, that we may become the household

of God. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law that the bliss of paradise may be ours, as God walks and talks with his child.

So may I go forth hand in hand with God ; my weakness lost in his might, my ignorance swallowed up in his wisdom ; no more lonely, no more unguided, no more wandering, but every-where God himself as my helper and friend. I can hold His hand and look out triumphantly over all the way. I can cling at his side, and defy all foes. I can go now into the trackless wilderness or through the murky night. I will instruct thee and teach thee, saith he. No want now, no weakness, but he is with me to supply my need. No pleasure but it finds a new joy in his presence ; no gain but it has a fuller worth in its consecration to him. This is the glorious revelation of Calvary : the Father himself loveth you.

“ I will guide thee with mine eye.” Think what gracious familiarity with him this implies ; what watchfulness and gentle teachableness he shall give. I can guide him who is afar off by my hand ; I can guide him who is in darkness by my voice. But the promise is, “ I will guide thee with mine eye ; ” then must I be

near him, ever looking up ; then must I walk in the light, as he is in the light, and my fellowship must be with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Be not as the horse or the mule ; bit and bridle must control and guide them. Pray God to take the stubbornness and prejudice out of us ; pray God to take away the dull ear and the heavy eye, the slow perception and the sluggish consciousness. We want a heart that feels the hint of His desire, that vibrates at the breath of his bidding, that starts in glad obedience at the whisper of his will. The crowning glory of the height of forgiveness is more than deliverance. We learn a sweeter music and a deeper joy even than that mighty revelation of the Father. It is this union and communion with him, this tender susceptibility to his will, this bliss of his presence, this joy of his guidance—all the heaven of a pure love to him, a childlike trust, a glad obedience.

And this new life is strong, and blessed, and triumphant, as we let the divine presence come into us. The forgiven man has no more strength in himself than he had before ; his strength is in God. Fling open wide the

thoughts, and let him fill the soul. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.”

Do not tarry singing of forgiveness only; go on to find the blessed life in this glorious presence of thy Father, God.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST IN RELATION TO
THE BLESSED LIFE.

A GREAT writer, one of the foremost of the day, has declared that the world has done with a God who must be approached through blood. All of us are apt to judge "the world" by the little bit of it with which each comes into contact. Fortunately it does not need vast intellectual ability in order to qualify an opinion on this matter. We all of us have some degree of experience and observation; and to many it is not a matter of argument, but of a blessed confidence, that never in any age were so many finding a conscious forgiveness through Him in whom we have redemption through his blood. Never before were so many walking in the light, and having fellowship one with another, and proving that the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth from all sin. This God, "who must be approached

through blood," is our own gracious and loving Father. We are not thrust from Him by this way of access, but by it we who were sometime afar off are made nigh.

Yet while this way of approach is to us a way of peace, the ground of our hope, the great voice of love itself, to others this "approach through blood" is not only a stumbling-block; it is more than that: it is an idea shocking and revolting; it sends them away from God as a grim and dreadful Being of whom they do not care to think. It is well for us to look boldly and earnestly into a doctrine which to us is everything, and yet which is capable of being so easily turned into a very coarse and hideous objection against the truth. Honestly and fearlessly let us look into it, as those who know in whom we have believed and are persuaded that there is in him nothing which can be contrary to perfect love.

It may perhaps be well to remind ourselves that in this matter, as perhaps in some others, the figurative and somewhat exaggerated language of hymns has much to answer for in creating a prejudice. But surely, if anywhere we may demand "a poetical license" in the

use of words, it is in a case where they are the expression not only of a fervent imagination, but also of a great deliverance. Feelings that fill the soul with rapture burst the little phrases of a cruel precision, and can only find room in large utterances and figures which the cold literalist turns from contemptuously. To the literalist who pulls to pieces such words as these there is something very revolting in,

“ There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins ;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

And again in the familiar words,

“ Sink into the purple flood ;
Rise into the life of God ! ”

We are not going to bid these happy souls hold their peace because some stand by coldly criticising their songs. There are words that are to be interpreted only by the feelings that underlie them. Yet it is needful that the Scriptures be held responsible for the spirit only, and not for the figure of such hymns.

With this single explanation, rather than apology, we have nothing else that need keep

us from looking fully into the doctrine of the blood.

“Ye are come,” says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” The blood that speaketh. It seems first, perhaps, a strange, almost dreadful thing to say of Jesus. We know that blood has a voice; we know how whole families and clans and countries have been moved by it; how the land has been stirred and thrilled by it; how men have been gathered by it—resolute, unsparing, knit together and fired by that voice of blood. But it is a voice that cries only for jealousy, revenge, death. The word “blood” offends us; the sight of it shocks us.

How, then, can this ever come to be the voice by which God speaks to us—he who is love? How can this ever be the voice by which we speak to God, who is our gracious and loving Father? Why should this be the voice that is heard throughout all worlds, and which goes sounding through all the ages: the voice of the blood of sprinkling?

The voice is set here in contrast with “that

of Abel." The story of Abel may help us, perhaps, to hear and to understand this strange and mighty voice of "the blood that speaketh."

Let us listen to the voice of Cain's offering. In process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground unto the Lord. He brought flowers and fruits and roots. Here is a voice that God can listen to and delight in. What else could be so acceptable to God? What has earth so fair and beautiful? Of all voices, softest and sweetest, surely, is the voice of this offering. Fair forms and rich colors blend in perfect beauty. Flowers and trailing leaves, and ivy sprays and fronds of fern, all bright with the dew of God's own blessing, fresh from his own hand, breathing sweet fragrance as incense for his service—what else could be so fitting for God's altar? Here is no hint of suffering; here is no dreadful tale of cruelty and bloodshed; here, of all things, are those which the curse hath touched most lightly, and in Eden itself the rose and lily could scarcely have been lovelier. Here is no stain of passion, no touch of sin, no whisper of sorrow. What fairer

gift could God desire? What sweeter gift could earth afford?

And listen to the message which the voice of this offering spake from God to Cain. "See," they sang, "how God hath decked us in beauty. He who hath set his great sun in the heavens, and who holdeth up the pillars of the earth, hath shaped us, stem and leaf and bud and flower. He paints these colors; he breathes this fragrance; he giveth not bread alone, but thus he decks the earth with gladness. See in us the perfection of his power and skill. He hath so fitted sunshine and season, earth and seed, light and air and rain, he hath balanced all so delicately that these mighty forces meet in us and greet thee, Cain."

And Cain heard the voice, and laid them on the altar of God, and they became in turn a voice that spoke from him to God: "O great Creator, here behold my gift! In these I confess my dependence upon thy bounty. I accept and adore thy goodness, thy power, thy wisdom. I bow and bless thy name, and thus show forth my gratitude to Thee."

And Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock. A lamb, the emblem of gentleness and

purity. But there is here a constraint and fear that were altogether wanting in Cain's offering: separated from the flock, led and bound to the altar, in no way has it the beauty and attractiveness of the other gift. This, too, was a voice that spake to Abel of God's goodness and care; of power and wisdom and providence; of gracious and bountiful provision. And in this Abel found a voice that told of his dependence upon God and of his gratitude.

And now if dependence and gratitude make up religion let each go down to his house justified. The service is over; each has worshiped and each has done well. But see! Abel lays his hand roughly on the struggling lamb. It is slain. The blood reddens the altar. The torn and bleeding victim lies upon the altar of God. Here is another voice—so sad, so terrible—the voice of blood! Cain's gift was beautiful. This is loathsome and dreadful; every thing within us shrinks from it. What can this say from Abel to God—God the Creator, merciful and gracious, who careth tenderly for all that his hands have made? To him every sight of suffering is a pain and grief.

• Yet look again. Cain and his offering are rejected ; his fair gift is in vain. And Abel is accepted ; his bleeding gift avails. Over him there comes the sunny smile of God's favor, and he has the testimony that God is well pleased.

What does it mean ? Is God, as some have dared to say, a fierce and dreadful being who can only be approached with sights of cruelty and suffering and death ? What can it mean ? Let us ask the question, seeking to get in at the truth for ourselves. We cannot afford to trust traditions, to merely inherit our beliefs. We dare not drift along in vague dependence upon other people's opinions. Still less can we afford to keep dark thoughts locked up within us that we are afraid to face—thoughts that haunt the lonely places of the soul and mutter things that burden with fear and horror. Better no God at all than a God whom we cannot trust utterly, through and through, in deed and in every thing. I must have in God one whom I can love perfectly, in whom heart and mind and soul and strength can rest with a perfect satisfaction. Here, indeed, " the want of faith in aught is want of faith in all."

But turn to the brothers again. Here Cain comes in haste. His face is filled with rage; the dark brows knit in fierce anger; his eyes shooting lightnings; his lips bitten, or loosed only to mutter dreadful things. His hands are stained with blood, and blood bespatters his dress. And there, lying stretched on the ground, is Abel dead; murdered. "Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

What now if Cain should come again, and with these stained fingers set up the dainty blossoms, and array the green leaves, and deck the altar with the fruits? What now if he should stand listening to the sweet voice of these fair flowers, telling of goodness and wisdom and skill? What now if in these things such an one should seek a voice to utter quietly his dependence on God and his gratitude to him? Every thing within us would be angry and indignant at such a sight. What has a wretch like this to do with flowers and fruit? Why, those hands would wither them. His touch would defile them. Flowers and fruit! No; earth shall yield him no more. Beneath his footsteps the very grass shall wither, leav-

ing a scarred and barren track where he has trodden. His very shadow shall blight all things sweet and beautiful. He is a murderer ; and if ever this man speak to God, and if ever God speak to him, it must be with another and very different voice from these. Ask yourself what voice can say to him what he ought to hear. The voice must be the voice of thunder ; of earthquake ; fierce fires. These are the voices for such an one : voices of destruction ; voices of terror ; voices of justice and vengeance. There is yet another voice, stern and dreadful : a voice that can speak to this man of God's most holy law ; that can make him see that his merit is death ; a voice that can fill him with shame and sorrow and heart-broken penitence. And yet a voice that may tell of love even for him ; a voice in which hope and mercy may speak, too. It is the voice of blood.

But go back again to the moment when Cain stood at the altar bringing the first-fruits of the earth. In him then were all these dreadful possibilities of evil. In our sight sin is an act, but in God's sight it is a condition. While he stood there worshipping God saw

the passion that slept in his heart, the murderous envy that lay coiled like a sleeping serpent. God looked right in upon these foul and awful things. How, then, could God speak to him or he to God with the voice of things sweet and fair like the flowers and fruit?

And so God looks upon us. Within us he sees our sin, an awful fact; the black source of a thousand evil things. Our sin rises up like that dead Abel and thrusts us back from God. Ah! we need another voice than that of flowers and fruit; their beauty is mocked by the foulness which he sees within us. Our hot hands wither them; our touch defiles them. And now there faces us this great question: What can God do with our sin?

Can he hush it up and make light of it? That is to imperil all things. He is holy. The very strength of his love is holiness. There is no controversy in God. His holiness is not arrayed against his mercy nor his mercy against his holiness. His love is always holy. His holiness is always love. But what can holy love do with sin? A love that could pass over sin would cease at once to be love. We could not trust it, could not honor it,

could not care to accept it. We should feel that there was a crack and flaw right down through the very foundation of the universe, which some day would hurl all things into a black and awful ruin. What, then, can God do with sin, unless he lets it work out its own natural and dreadful end—death?

If ever we who have sinned are to speak to God, if ever God, against whom we have sinned, is to speak to us, do we not feel that it must be in some way that shall make us see and feel the great righteousness against which we have sinned, and yet in which we may hear the tones of his great love; a voice that shall lead us to a true submission and penitence, and yet which can proclaim the law satisfied; a voice that shall speak the past forgiven, and yet in that forgiveness reveals a power and motive that helps us against sin for the future?

This is the voice of blood.

We hear all this faintly but unmistakably in the voice of Abel's offering: "Thou art holy, O God! Here I acknowledge thy righteousness. I have sinned against Thy holiness. Here I confess my sin, and here with peni-

tence I acknowledge my merit is death. Here I accept thy great love, which has provided one in whom the world is to find salvation. Thus do I declare my faith in Him, the 'Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' And here, in thy forgiveness and gracious acceptance, I acknowledge thy claim upon my love and service, and I find a strength to do thy holy will."

Once more, in the light of that sacrifice, let us ask ourselves: What can God do with our sin? That is the only answer. And let us go on to ask three other questions which stare the ages in the face as the great problems of all time.

How can we see our sin in the light of God's holiness and not for ever despair?

Or, if forgiven, how can we find forgiveness of our sin without coming to think carelessly of that which is so easily forgiven?

Or yet, again, if making much of our forgiveness, how can we ever come to find ourselves living righteously without falling into that consciousness of our superiority which is the root of all Phariseeism? To these three questions is there any other answer than this:

Through the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel?

Here we may find the reason why so many do not find in religion the satisfaction that they need. They sit under the word, and yet it never becomes a living reality. They pray, and yet they never have any sense of the divine favor. They are devout and reverent, yet they cannot find rest and peace. They have a religion, but it is not a religion they would like to die with. There is no deliverance, no triumph, no light of his countenance filling them with joy and a conscious victory. The power of sin is not broken. They wonder why. They almost feel tempted to mock at those who do find in the service of God the aim and delight of their whole life. And yet they are sincere in their prayers. They kneel and confess their dependence upon Him; they acknowledge his greatness, and thank him for his gifts, and offer him of their substance, and yet they have no conscious acceptance with him. Can we not put our finger upon the cause of this failure? They have stopped short of the blood of sprinkling. They have got exactly as far as Cain got—and no farther.

All else is of no avail until we reach this : "Ye are come. . . . to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh," says the apostle here. Come, then, as those that have sinned, let us draw near and listen to this wondrous voice of the blood.

"Behold the Lamb of God," who is given as the sacrifice for our sins; "who beareth away the sin of the world." Sit here and listen with the ear of thine heart to this voice of the blood. O my soul, how deep and terrible a reality is thy sin, if to save thee from its curse the Son of God must come from heaven, the only begotten, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father! See, he hangeth upon the cross, the King of glory; who can tell the depths of this bitter shame, who can ever know the awful agony of that hour? Torn, mocked, deserted, accursed—thus hath he brought out and set up the dreadful meaning of my sin.

There are moments when no words can tell the horror with which men turn from some glimpse of the hateful possibilities of evil that lie within them. But alas, there are other times when all the consciousness of sin is numbed, paralyzed, dead. Sin is but a tradi-

tion, a word, a thing scarcely noticed and easily forgotten. O how do we need this mighty voice of the blood that speaketh to us—so awful, so persistent, so unsparing; forever uttering, not in word only, but in deed and in truth, what our sin is! The measure of my sin, its length and breadth, its height and depth, is in the cross of Christ. The voice of God's judgment meets me there. There and there only can I hear what God saith of sin.

And yet, come again and listen. Not of condemnation only does this voice of the blood speak. It tells of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and yet it tells of love—infinite, amazing, overwhelming love. How dear must I be to the heart of the Father, if for me he has given his Son, his only Son, his well beloved! What a desire to save is this! How strong and yearning, how deep and eager is the love which speaks to me in the gift of such a sacrifice and such a Saviour! Sin black and awful, yet love immense and infinite, is the proclamation of this wondrous voice of the blood. O blessed be God forever for this voice, that soundeth through all time

and to all men a great message of entreaty and tenderest compassion! Herein is love. Here is the fountain of hope, here is the voice that speaketh of the black dreadfulness of sin; here is the terrible manifestation of what our sin is, and yet here is the great pledge and measure of God's love, unchangeable, eternal, infinite.

Again, that "voice of the blood" speaks of the holy law satisfied. Death is the penalty of sin. "The wages of sin is death." I hear this proclaimed, as nothing else could proclaim it, in this great sacrifice. But as I bow at the cross I hear another voice. That sacrifice declares the righteousness of God satisfied: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Here is the mighty and prevailing voice that forever speaks to God for me. In that cross I see the black vision of my sin in all its dreadfulness. There I see God's judgment and sentence upon my sin, but there, too, I find my representative, my substitute. Christ hath suffered, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," In him "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness

of sins." The voice of the blood is the eternal declaration of God's righteousness for the remission of sins; "That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The voice of the blood is no more a dreadful clamor for vengeance and punishment; it is the "fear not" of God to the heart of the world. It comes amid our darkness and striving, our fear and helplessness, and speaketh, "Peace, be still," and there is a great calm. All the condemning voice of the past is hushed: "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Do not let us care to inquire too curiously as to how the blood of Christ atones for our sins. Let us remember that our conceptions of the claims and majesty of God's righteousness are very dim. We can and do find in the blood of sprinkling that which we need. What if there lie around and about the cross depths of mystery that we cannot know as yet; is it not the more divine thereby, and not the less so? Perhaps we cannot exactly put into any words the way in which the death of Christ becomes the ground of our forgiveness. We do know, and join our testimony with thousands

of others, that coming to the blood of sprinkling we find not a grim and dreadful being, but the blessed way to the heart of our Father, God. We find there a joy and deliverance, a conscious forgiveness and a testimony of acceptance, such as the whole world longs for, and which the world can find nowhere else. And assuredly experience is as good and sound an evidence in matters of religion as it is in any thing else.

There and there only is the power by which we were redeemed from the curse of the law. There and there only is the power by which the flesh is crucified with the lusts thereof. There and there only are we crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us.

So, then, if the blessed life begins in a clear and complete deliverance from the past—a new life without condemnation or fear, its very starting-point is in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

If the blessed life means a tender sensitiveness to sin, an abhorrence of it as loathsome, where else can that be created or sustained

save in the cross of Christ? There is the awful sentence and end of sin.

If the blessed life has its strength in a perfect surrender of self to the will of God, the sacrifice and death of self for the glory of God and the good of others, then here in the cross of Christ alone is the example, ever vivid and mighty, that summons us to such a life; here and here only are the obligation and the inspiration of the blessed life.

If the blessed life is, above all else, a great love to God—a love that masters and subdues us for his service; that draws out all the love of our hearts and compels the devotion of our whole lives—where else can we find the birth-place of such love, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Therefore, neither in this world nor in the world to come will we have done with this way of approach unto God through the precious blood of Christ. Here and hereafter it shall be the strength of our hope, the source of our joy, the theme of our adoring love. Never old, never worn out: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.”

CHAPTER V.

COMMUNION.

THE NINETY-FIRST PSALM.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

OUR gracious God has many visitors, and has a kindly welcome for all who come to him. Some come as his poor dependents, knocking at the back door and seeking to get their basket filled with the scraps they need. Well, these shall not be sent empty away, but, alas, how much they lose! They have his gifts, but they never see his face, they never hear his voice, they never know his heart.

Some are his servants. They dwell with him. They seek to know his will, and set themselves to do it earnestly. They commune with him. And yet they do not dwell in the innermost circle. Having done his work they turn to their own. There are limits and divisions of interest.

Some are his children. They are always with him. They live in his presence: they are ever at home with him. They know his heart. Unto them he saith, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

Pauper, servant, son—which are we? This psalm is the song of one who dwells with God. The psalm of the Son, from which the tempter fetched the quotation with which he feathered his arrow: "If thou be the Son of God; . . . for it is written . . ." He whose heart can sing this song has found in God a rest, a satisfaction, a delight, a home.

It is supposed by many that this psalm was written by Moses. Certainly there are in it allusions that would come most naturally from one in his circumstances. This first verse gathers a fullness of new meaning as we think of it coming from his lips. We think of him in the wilderness, wearied with a people who seemed incapable of entering into any worthy thought of their high calling, vexed at the delays and wanderings; wearied, too, by the unchanging dreariness of the desert. He, a whole heaven above the people in the nobility of his spirit, turns from all this to find comfort in God, and

prays, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." There is given the gracious answer, "Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock. . . . I will put thee in a cleft of the rock. I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." We think of him going up into the secret place of the Most High—away from the multitude into the unbroken calm and stillness; up from the dreary monotony of the desert into the Mount of the Lord, with new beauties opening before him at every step; up from the languid heat into the fresh wind of the early morning; on to where God himself waits with all-gracious welcome, and then into the cave. And there the Lord, the Lord God, passed by and proclaimed himself. And there Moses finds God as his own—"my God"—and puts Israel into his keeping, and prays him to come and make his abode among them.

That mountain height, that secret place, is within our reach. It is Calvary. There are the clefts of the rock wherein we hide while God comes down to make his goodness pass before us. Then may we draw near to say of

him, "My God," and to find in him our dwelling-place and home.

Our home in God. Let the thought sink down into the heart and become a desire, a purpose, a possession. It is for us, for each one of us, to know it if we will; to go up out of the way of the wilderness, and to find our rest and dwelling-place in him. Outside are biting winds and bitter rains; outside are stony ways and stony faces too; outside are the fleeting hopes that find no place to light upon, wishes that are swiftly swept away by fear; outside all that suggests hurry, and toil, and want, and uncertainty; a hungry world, not knowing what it seeks, but believing that its satisfaction lies ever a little farther on. To step out of this into the secret place of the Most High—what is it? To find one's self no more a bubble flung on lawless seas; no more a fallen leaf, the sport of wintry winds; but round and about us are the everlasting arms, and we rest against the very heart of our Father, God; to be known through and through—all the weakness and the want, the wasted past, the dreadful possibilities of evil within us—and yet to be loved infinitely; to

be known in all our dull thought of things, our clumsy failure, our quick forgetfulness, our shallowness and cowardice, and yet to hold as our own such exceeding precious promises of blessedness; to pass out of the din and the grinding wheels of earth, with its mystery of want and pain and sorrow, and to rest in a great assurance of pity and help for every one—that behind all things and running through and through all things is the love of the Father, and that all things are set to this one end: to help men up to higher life, no more the uncertain, but a very *terra firma*; lying down in the shadow of the Eternal; feeling that waves may toss far down below us, and tides may come and go, but this sure rock of our resting-place abideth for ever and ever; to have the hallowing hush of God's own presence, the soothing, strengthening touch of his own hand, the heaven of his smile and favor—this is to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. To let ourselves and ours go with a glad abandonment right into the keeping of his love; to live with a childlike freedom from care, or fear, or want, knowing that he careth for us; to be loosed from ambi-

tion; to have no fierce and jealous eagerness, and yet to be stirred with a great desire and a fixed endeavor to know his will and to please him perfectly—this is to dwell in his secret place. And there, hidden in the cleft of the rock, it is ours to look out on all things, finding every-where the revelation of his goodness, and hearing evermore that voice proclaiming “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious.”

“He that dwelleth . . . shall abide.” These words denote the settled and unchanging. This is no occasional privilege, as when the high priest once a year went into the holiest of all. It is no exceptional thing—the festival of some rare day. No vision is it, shortlived. Not a rift in the clouds, a passing glimpse of a glory that is to be hereafter. We dwell, and he abides. God is to us what we will let him be. He changeth not. Where we are bold to come there may we be bold to stay. He will not go away; nor need we. If we will dwell there, there will he abide.

A secret place. He only that seeketh shall find it. A blessedness of which any man may say, “It shall be mine, and I will search dili-

gently until I find it ;” but they shall never know it who think they can drift to heaven with languid desires and lofty longings that come to nothing. Nor is it for those who can put heart and soul into every thing else, sticking at it until they do succeed, but in religion are content with theories and notions, with mere creeds and services. Yet every one that seeketh findeth. It is an open secret to the searcher. These further heights of blessedness are not a kind of Alpine climbing, requiring great endurance, and much skill, and resolute courage. Seek—never mind how clumsily, if only the heart be in it. Seek. God sends forth his light and truth ; they wait for us at the foot of the holy hill. Seek and ye shall find. Men lose these things not because they do not understand them, and not because they do not desire them, but because they do not seek them.

And then, seeking and finding the secret place, its full blessedness is for those only who will make themselves at home in it. Custom and blessed familiarity are needful to home. “Is this our home?” said my little one to me as we drove up to the door of a new

abode. "No," said I, "not yet. It is our house—it will be our home, I hope, when we get used to it."

Soul, the secret of finding thy home in God is to be much at home with him.

"I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

Here the reader sighs, thinking, "Ah, it is a long way up to such blessedness as that. I—poor, dull, unworthy I—cannot presume to seek such a privilege." But look: the scene changes altogether. Away at the entrance of the valley there stands the castle; the high towers from which the banners wave; the ramparts where valiant men in armor pace watchfully; the buttressed walls, and moat and guarded entrance; and within these are the royal apartments where dwells the king with his lords and knights. We, alas! are afar off. Not for us a home like that. But some day the foe sweeps across the country, bringing ruin and death wherever they come. Behind them the sky is ruddy with the fires of the destroyer. Then poor peasants fly from their lowly homesteads—fathers with lads and maidens, mothers with their little ones.

Whither shall these helpless ones hurry? Why, to the castle, of course. What is the good of a refuge if it is only for valiant knights and mighty men? It is on purpose for the weak, the little, the helpless. The foe shall find only massive walls and the deep moat, and soldiers who stand ready to receive them; but for these helpless ones there is a postern gate, low down within their reach, where they can find entrance and safety.

A home in God! I may fear to say so much as that. But here is the door within my reach: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge." Think not that our glorious God is for communion with the holy angels only, a home for lofty saints and heroes in his service. He stoops to thee and me; and because we are weak and helpless and in peril we can find in him our refuge.

Here may each begin. "My refuge." Think of the foes that pursue us. Out of that past come the troops of the things undone, half done, ill done. The passing wish. The evil thought, the hasty word, the influence for ill, these things cry out against us and follow us. That past cannot be buried, cannot be hushed.

or hidden ; it lives and chases us. There is a refuge and fortress. It is in Christ the Lord. He hath borne our sins in his own body on the tree. He by the grace of God hath tasted death for every man. He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. "He is my refuge." A refuge even as when the great rock in the desert lifts itself up and catches the fierceness of the noonday sun, the fiery darts, that it may cast its cool and refreshing shade over those who rest in its hollow places ; or as when the little fishing boats lie safe within the harbor, because the rocky cliffs rise up and catch the beat of furious seas that dash with thunder and hurl the showers of spray far up the sides ; or as when the massive walls receive the spear and arrow and beat them back dented and broken to the ground, that the weak ones within the stronghold may be safe. So hath the Lord, who is my refuge, given himself for my deliverance and safety. He hath met and by his own death he hath for ever silenced my foes. And now "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Over all the past there goes the hush

of God's forgiveness. "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge."

But do not put a full stop there. At once there comes the next step: "my refuge and fortress." A refuge is the place in which I hide from my sins. A fortress is where I turn to fight them. Make the Lord thy refuge, and then at once up the steps and on to the ramparts. "And my fortress." Let me run from my sins till I find my Lord; but in him, as my impregnable stronghold, let me defy them all. There, soul, is the secret of victory. Outside the refuge thou art ruined, but inside the fortress thou art conquerer. Sin may summon thee to surrender, and sound the trumpet, and bend the bow, and talk exceeding proudly, but my Lord is my fortress. Then let me boldly claim the victory. In him it is mine to live with a defiance of my foes. It is ours to put the glorious Lord himself—his grace and his power—as the walls of the fortress between us and our sins. Ill-temper, hasty speech, fretting, foreboding, pride, envy, indolence, love of the world, of gain, of self, and every other evil thing, now may we claim the victory over them all since the Lord is our fortress! Of thyself

and in thyself nothing, willing to be weak, a very coward outside the refuge; but in him daring to expect and to claim a constant conquest, since the Lord is thy helper. "Without me ye can do nothing." Right gladly do we acknowledge it, gracious Master. Thou art our refuge. But we can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth us; thou art our fortress.

"I will say of the Lord"—there is much in that. We lose much because it lives only in suggestion, in vague thought, in passing desire. The truth wants to be grasped with a resolute grip; to be fixed and riveted by a word that gathers up all the soul and utters it. Say it now: I—there must be the personal assertion; I will—there must be resoluteness; I will say—let there be the determined expression; I will say of the Lord, he is my—there must be a personal claiming and possession. Say it, then, soul; say it yet again; keep saying it. To speak the thing is often to turn a thought into desire, and desire into purpose, and purpose itself into half possession. Here and now it may be into full possession. "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress."

But the full stop is not yet. From the ramparts I am led within the royal apartments. And, lo! the Lord bringeth me into the banqueting chamber, and there, beneath the banner of his love, I learn to rest in the secret place, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. I, even I, am bold to say, my God.

“My God.” Each heart must unlock for itself the wonderful wealth and fullness that are hidden in these words. We cannot come to say them as the result of cold argument or exposition. These can only point us on toward the secret place. This glad possession is born only of communion, heart union, as when God made his goodness to pass before Moses it was that he cried, “My Lord!” It comes of contact, as when the finger rested on the very wound-print, and the hand was laid upon that sacred side; then Thomas’s soul leapt forth with this glad utterance, “My Lord, and my God!” It is a knowledge of a love in which God gives himself to me—all mine. And I by the sweet constraint of love’s own interchange give myself up to him. My God! It is to find in him my perfect satisfaction, to delight in his law, to serve him in the al-

mightiness of his help, to lie down in his care, to dwell in the safety and blessedness of his presence, and to look up for the gladness of a communion with him face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

‘ My God.’ Words that seem too daring for any human lips: too great a boast for any man. And yet I may speak them. I, who found in him but yesterday my refuge, and who came seeking in him only my fortress, may boldly claim his fullness for my own. I can lose my fear and feebleness and want in him, like a drop of rain that falls into the sea; and I possess him in his infinite fullness. Come, timid child, wilt thou say it?—My God. Tremblingly, perhaps, at first, but say it. Ah, if thou wilt hide in the cleft of the rock, and wait and muse, the words shall well up from thine heart. Thou canst say of the Lord, “He is my refuge.” Tarry here, then, and gaze upon the Crucified. Thinkest thou that the cross is the glorious token of how God once loved the world; as if it swept and surged about the world, a very flood of love, that left here its mark and measure, while the love itself was withdrawn into the bosom of our

God? Nay, the cross is the token, the pledge, the measure of an everlasting love. That, in all its agony of desire and unutterable eagerness to help and to bless, is the declaration of how God feels toward the world to-day. "The world." Dost thou sigh, thinking, "Yes, to the world. A pity moved by a mass of suffering in which I am but one!" Nay! God's love is perfect. If he love thee at all, he can only love thee with all his love. Love cannot be shared. It is all in all or not at all. It is every-thing or nothing. Our love—misled, deceived, too passionate and then forgetful—partakes of human frailty; yet is it a thing almost divine. Like God, it is infinite, it is immortal, defying force. Think, then, of the great, deep, perfect love of God—all thine; as if he had no other heart on which to bestow his love. "My God," thou mayest say right boldly, "as if I were his only child. His power mine, all mine; as if the everlasting arms were only for my protection. His wisdom mine, as if it were nothing but the guidance of my steps. He mine, as if I were his universe and he my God."

But is not this the essence of selfishness, of

greediness, forgetting others in the vastness of my claim? Ah, this is the glory of our God. Here greediness is consecrated. Here am I exhorted to covet earnestly, for covetousness itself is ennobled. The more of earth I have, the less others may call their own; but the more of God I have, the more shall others have as theirs. Love and truth and goodness cannot be hoarded. They live by blessing like God's sun by shining.

“In him will I trust”—of course, and irresistibly. Faith cannot be forced; it must be won. It is a poor trust that lives by argument. Here is faith's birthplace and home—in knowing Him. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep”—that is the cry of faith. With such mighty power and such tender care about us we trust because we cannot help it; without effort; almost without consciousness of trusting, lying down in the everlasting arms of love.

So, then, I will give myself with a glad abandonment to him who is my God. All things that come I will take from him, in every thing sure of his love. All things I have I will use

for him, making his good things better by his service.

“Let good or ill befall,
It must be good for me :
Secure of having thee in all,
Of having all in thee.”

Surely he shall deliver thee. Now follows a description of the safety of our home. When we dwell in the secret place of the Most High, the hospitality of our Host, the honor of our King, the tender care of our Father, the glory of our God are alike involved in our safety. Harm might come to us from the strength of the enemy ; or through the weakness of our defense ; or through the carelessness of our guardian. It is good to lie in our stronghold, and to call up possibilities of evil only to see them become impossibilities the moment we turn to our God. When Omnipotence protects, what foe can prevail? Carelessness ! nay, indeed ; never was love so watchful, so eager, so constant as that which encompasseth us. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber.

But there is another source of peril. It is

not in him, but in ourselves; in our foolish wanderings, in our presumption, our unwatchfulness. Then comes at once an illustration of His care and a suggestion of our danger. "He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler;" that is, from the little things, the hidden traps and nets that are set for us. This first, as if this deliverance were most needful. Great sins frighten where little snares entangle. It is easier to escape the huntsman's arrow than the crafty lure. And where are they not set? Riches and poverty, sickness and strength, prosperity and adversity, friendship and loneliness, the work and the want of it—each has its snare, wherein not only are the unwary caught, but the wise and the watchful sometimes fall a prey. Little things, mere threads, hardly worth guarding against—yet are they strong enough to hold us and hinder us, and may be the beginning of our destruction.

See, here is the lark caught in the net—its foot is tangled in the cord. Twist and struggle and flutter as it may, it cannot rise; its very efforts only make it more hopelessly fixed. There far above it stretches the fair

blue heaven, and it spreads its wings and longs to soar. From the grove there is the music of the happy birds that delight in their freedom; but, it can only utter a dreary note of distress. Now there comes one who sees it and with tender pity hastens to its rescue. He folds the bird gently within his hand, and then with skillful fingers disentangles and untwists the net and the poor captive is loosed from the snare. "Foolish bird," saith he, "thou shouldest be more watchful." And then he opens his hand. At once it flies far into the heavens, and now, sure of its safety, it sings as it soars, and soars as it sings, as if its passionate gladness and gratitude can find no sufficient outlet.

How often is it so with us! We, too, are caught in the snare of the fowler; little things that tie and hold us to the earth. The desires go out after God, but we linger far below. We hear the joy of others who dwell in the light of his countenance; but we are threatened with evil and filled with fear. Some foolish overeagerness, some depression of mind or body, some neglect, some unwatchfulness, some ill-will has caught us and holds us down. O,

blessed be that gracious Lord whose quick eye seeth our need ; who stoopeth so low to loose us from the snare ; whose tender patience and ready skill do set us free once more, so that we soar and sing again far up in the light at heaven's very gate. "He restoreth my soul." "He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler."

"He shall deliver thee . . . from the noisome pestilence." The vast ; the invisible ; that which wraps itself about a nation, enfolding it with death ; coming noiseless as the night ; lurking in the air ; which no skill can detect, which no care can avoid ; finding its prey alike in him who hurries on his duty, and in him who is the slave of sin. Here, too, fear not. Go bravely on. Wealth, wisdom, strength, can avail us nothing amid such peril ; yet need we fear no evil. With a trustful heart and a glad confidence look up to thy God ; he knows, he watches, he leads, he protects. He shall deliver thee.

"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." Our gracious God would wrap us round with his love. He would have us rest, not only in safety, but in

such snugness and cosiness of shelter—under his feathers. I went once over one of our principal fortifications; past terraces of artillery, up guarded heights, here and there looking out on the blue waters where lay the monster iron-clads asleep: past troops of soldiers with roll of drum and bugle-call. “Here,” I thought, “is safety: these heights that no enemy could scale, and thus securely protected; and yet, who would care to live here, amid these cannons, where trees and flowers are out of place, and the only sound is of military music and the orders of the officers?” Then, suddenly, I came upon a little cottage, almost hidden amid luxurious growth of flowers; rose, and jessamine, and honeysuckle clustered about the door, and hung around the windows; the narrow beds were full of gayer colors; the canary, hung in the deep porch, rang out its merriest music; and from within the house there came the happy laughter of the children. This just took hold of the whole scene and transformed it. It turned the grim hardness of the fortifications into a blessed safety. It was a warm, living heart in the midst of the defenses. I recall it as a poor earthly sugges-

tion of what is set forth here. Here is the Omnipotence that girds us round about with perfect safety. But here is not power only. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings "shalt thou trust." Ah! such a home is there in the heart of this power; such a tender love. This is where God would have us—in where we can ever feel the pulsing of his love toward us; compassed about with favor as with a shield.

"His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." As if all this power and this wondrous love were not enough, the whole is yet further guarded by his truth. Thy hiding-place is within the warmth and snugness of his love; about thee is Almighty power as thy defense; and then, as if to make assurance doubly sure, he gives thee the pledge of his own truth. Our gracious God seems to hand over to us the title-deeds that convey this glorious freehold to us, and duly signs and seals it. His honor binds him evermore to us, and binds us evermore to him.

O soul, be still and meditate upon this. Slowly count up what great store of blessedness thou hast in thy God. We trip lightly over

the words—even words sublime as these may come to be but familiar sounds; or we linger over the beauty, the majesty, the sublimity of the sentiment as if these truths, like the shining stars, were to be admired only, not possessed. We need to make these words our own, our very own, in soberest prose and living fact just true to the letter for us. All this is what God, even thy God, would be to thee. All this is what thou mayest know. This is where thou mayest dwell. Of this loftiest height and of this innermost blessedness may it be spoken, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

“Thou shalt not be afraid.” Very wonderful, too, is this note of the song, and very blessed. God not only saves us from our foes, but he saves us from our fears. We sometimes laugh at the silly fears of our little ones, who magnify their fancies into dreadful evils. Think, then, what our silly fears must be in the sight of our God. And how dishonoring, since he he has given us such assurances to encourage our trust. And yet our God stoops to soothe away our fears. He laughs at the threats of his enemies, and hath them in derision; but

never at the fears of his children. Do you remember when God had pledged to Gideon the destruction of the Midian host, how tender a word he spake to the brave captain? "If thou fear, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say." Then away under cover of the darkness crept Gideon and his companion. And as they moved about among the sleeping soldiers it came to pass that one lifted himself from his uneasy slumbers and told his fellow of his dream. "Such a strange dream," said he: "I dreamt that a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and it came unto a tent and smote it that it fell." Then he to whom the dreamer told his dream answered, with troubled voice: "This is nothing else but the sword of Gideon; for into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all his host." Then Gideon's heart leaped up to God with a great thanksgiving. He came back girt with new strength—"Arise," said he, "for the Lord hath delivered Midian into your hands!"

Surely here is the very completeness of all tender love, that does not only guard us thus from our foes, but stoops to quiet thus our

foolish fears. Fear not then, soul, to take thy fears to Him, who knows well how to cure them. If he have borne thy sins, he will bear with thy fears; and his tender love is glad to give us this deliverance.

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day.” By night he is ever watchful; by day he is swift to deliver. For the night the Lord is a sun; for the arrow he is a shield. Fear not, then, the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

The vastness of the evil brings no peril to the man who is in God. Under his shadow, that which threatens must strike through the Most High before it can reach us. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.

How grand a thing is this simple, untroubled trust in God! How powerless in its presence is every foe! When Omnipotence is our defense with what a majestic confidence may we come and go! The destroyer is spell-bound. Rage is harmless, like winds that sweep and howl among the rocks; fierce purposes are turned aside, “like lightning dead-

ened by the sea." Has earth a sublimer heroism than that of David; of Daniel; of the three Hebrew children; of St. Paul? Thank God, this is the miracle for all time: this calm triumph of faith. It is the glorious gift held out to each one of us. The wonder is that with such promises these victories of faith are so uncommon. Yet none can have moved much among earnest religious people, or have read the records of Christians during times of persecution, without being familiar with blessed instances of this heroism of trust.

Here is a bit of nineteenth-century heroism as sublime and triumphant as any thing of the past. It is from the *Life of Joel Bulu*, a Fijian missionary:*

"In the early morning we heard the war-trumpets sounding from three different points; and our people gathered together in the open space in front of my house, waiting for the battle. I went out to them, and cried with a loud voice, 'Sit down. Let every man sit down. Let them see that we do not want to fight. Sit down, and wait for the will of God. Then, if they fire upon us, let us spring

**Autobiography of Joel Bulu.* Edited by the Rev. G. S. Rowe.

to our feet and fight for the lives which he has given us.'

"So they all sat down in silence, each man with his weapon lying across his knees; and the blast of the war-trumpets sounded nearer and nearer, louder and ever louder, until the enemy appeared in sight on the edge of the forest—a great multitude of heathen warriors, all painted and armed for war. When they saw us, they set up a shrill cry; and as with a confused noise they came forward toward us, I spoke to our people, encouraging them. 'Sit still,' said I, 'the Lord will fight for us.' But when Abraham saw a number of the heathen leaving the main body, and making a circuit as if to get round to the back of our house, then he ran to prevent them, and certain of the young men also ran with him; but I called them back and made them sit down again with the others. 'Abraham,' said I, 'do you not know that we die to-day—you and I, and the rest of us here? Why, then, should you go forth to meet your death, and to bring it upon yourself? Let the Lord bring it upon us, and it will be well. Perhaps even now he will save us alive.'

“And the heathen came up to where we were sitting. Those who had guns pointed them at us; those who were armed with clubs raised them to strike; the spearmen poised their spears, making them quiver before our eyes; and the bowmen bent their bows; but no shot was fired, no blow was struck, no spear was thrown, and no arrow flew in our midst. What held them back I cannot say: this only I know, that for a long while they stood there threatening us with their weapons of war, while we sat in silence speaking never a word; but our hearts were crying to the Lord for help, and he heard their cry. At length, after the enemy had been for a long time thus threatening us, and we expecting every moment death at their hands, I saw a chief coming toward us through the town with a whale’s tooth in his hand. Walking forward between us and the heathen, he sat down and presented the tooth to them, begging that we might live, and that there might be no fighting. And when the chiefs had heard his words, they drew off their men to a distance, and sat down holding a council.

“After a while two old chiefs from the

heathen war-party came to me bringing with them a whale's tooth as a token of peace ; and sitting down before me in my house, they kissed my hands, sniffing at them, after our fashion in Fiji and Tonga, one taking one hand, and one the other.

“ ‘ Joel,’ said they, ‘ we know this day that you are a true man, and that your God is a great God. Wonderful are the things which we have seen to-day, for there was rage in our hearts, and it was in our minds to kill you all ; but when we came to where you were sitting in silence on the ground, all the strength departed from our hands, and we could do nothing against you. It is you, Joel, who have saved us alive. If we had killed you, it would have been shedding our own blood, for are not all your people our kinsfolk ? Therefore are we sent to ask pardon for our anger, to thank you for your long-suffering, and to tell you that we shall never forget your love to us. Let this tooth of a fish be the burying of all ill-will between us. Know this, moreover, that if any man hereafter does you any harm, he shall be clubbed, whosoever he be, and an oven shall be his grave.’ ”

CHAPTER VI.

COMMUNION.—CONTINUED.

THE NINETY-FIRST PSALM.

“Because thou hast made the Lord . . . thy habitation.”

HERE, again, the blessedness is his, and only his, who finds his home in God. “The Most High thy habitation.” Where do we live? Where the heart is. And where is the heart? For the heart ever draws with it all else. The thoughts loosed from other things do surely gravitate to the home of the heart. Where, then, is thy heart? for there is thy home. Is it in the business? Do the thoughts go of their own accord, and because they are free, away to the planning, and purchasing, and counting up of profit? Is it in the life of pleasure that is being arranged for? Is it away with the children, and amid home cares? Of course the thoughts must visit these things, and spend whole days with them, exactly as a man goes away to work; but

then, when the work is over, he goes home. Do we find our home in these things, sending our thoughts on errands up to God for blessing, and guidance, and care, and then coming back to these again as the home of the heart? Or do we visit these things only, and then take them with us to find our home in God—to lie down in his care; and to draw all about us and ours the glorious safety of his presence?

We go home without arrangement: we plan our visits and then go home because they are over. Duty, want, a host of things, lead us forth elsewhere; but the heart takes us home. Blessed, most blessed, is he whose thoughts pass up to God not because they are driven like a fisherman's craft swept by the fierceness of the storm; not because they are forced by want or fear; not because they are led by the hand of duty, but because God is his habitation and his home. Loosed from other things, the thoughts go home for rest. In God the blessed man finds the love that welcomes; there is the sunny place, there care is loosed and toil forgotten, there is the joyous freedom, the happy calm, the rest,

and renewing of our strength—at home with God.

“There shall no evil befall thee.” How can it? Trust in God makes us conquerors over sin, and turns all other evil into good. It is only because we do not take all things as from God, permitted by his love and wisdom and controlled by his power, that we can think of ill in any thing. That cannot be an evil which does a man good, nor that a loss which brings him gain, nor that a grief which crowns him with new kingliness and power for further conquest. To him who trusts in God, adversity carries in its bony hand the golden gifts of patience and courage; and pain itself ennobles with endurance and refines with the sweet graces of submission. That he who loves us with so wise and infinite a love permits what comes transforms it into good. Blessed indeed is he who learns to find in the dungeon the hid treasures of darkness; and in the deep waters the pearls that shall enrich and deck us through eternity.

So then, soul, be not hasty in setting up thy judgment as to what is good or evil. Life's vexations come not so much from evil things

as from an evil heart, that knows not what is good, and frets because its foolish fancies do not find indulgence. No wisely loving father would let his little one decide as to life's good and evil things—or where would lessons be, and the discipline that fits for manhood? We, dimly seeing at the best, see far enough to choose for them. Let our Father, gracious and all-seeing, choose for us. That which he sends is only good, and the fancied good that he sends not we are better without. Our truest, fullest and deepest good—life's very best—is to let him have his own way with us perfectly, and life's only evil is to resent, to hinder, to mistake his will; forever stands the cross of Christ, the great assurance of a love that nothing can gainsay—a love that is all ours, and ours in every thing. Of this be sure: if we could see all things as our Father sees them, we should bless him for doing as he does. When the day breaks and the shadows flee away we shall see it all, and then will we make it the theme of heaven's music. Till then we will rest in his love. He is ours, and we are his; and his joy is ever in our blessedness.

“For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.”

So, then, do not fear to go down from this high mount of the Lord to thy ways in the world no matter how commonplace and dull they may be, whether rough or smooth, whether lonely or crowded; though busied with common wants, burdened with common cares, go forth with a brave heart and an earnest soul into thy ways in the daily life; thy communion with God is not to make thee too dignified for walking in the by-ways of life, even over stony roads. Rather shall that communion make these common places dignified indeed by his regard, and by the escort he sends with thee, even as his presence and the angels made the stony Bethel of old into a very gate of heaven. He turns the very highest good to evil who suffers heavenly-mindedness to make him indolent or careless in minding his duty upon earth—which, if we but think of it rightly, is but another name for dishonesty, cheating both God and the neighbor. Communion with God is the fittest preparation for

all that a man can have to do in the world ; and doing well and thoroughly whatever must be done is the fittest preparation for further communion. He who bids us leave the gift on the altar and be reconciled to our brother would have us go back and be reconciled to any duty with which we may have quarreled. Saul's sacrifice is undone by the bleating and bellowing without ; it intrudes upon the holy service and disturbs it. So into God's ears comes the clamor of every work undone, half-done, ill-done, and jars upon the hour of prayer. However near to heaven we may dwell, it is to fit us for perfect service in all our ways on earth. If God's angels go with thee, soul, see that thy life be in keeping with thy company. He who walks with courtiers is careful to be courteous, and suits his very attire and his whole demeanor accordingly. The angels claim for their High Master's sake that in every thing we be faithful, and patient, and brotherly ; not over-eager for the world, as having our treasure in him ; and yet not despising it, as belonging to him. Count no duty too little, no round of life too small, no work too low if it come in thy way, since God thinks

so much of it as to send his angels to guard thee in it ; and be sure thou dost not murmur at thy way, or think it a hard one, if the holy angels are willing to go with thee. Thy murmurings will be but an ill accompaniment for their music.

“ They shall bear thee up in their hands.” It is another token of God’s gracious care concerning us and our safety. His angels—think how at times the presence of some one of these mighty messengers of God has flashed from behind the veil, and earth has trembled at their mighty power. David sings of the angels as those that do excel in strength. Remember how the first-born of Egypt was smitten in every home, and how the proud hosts of Assyria fell dead in the night. Be bold, then, if these are thy body-guard.

And yet the promise has its limits: “ in all thy ways.” The tempter chose this text to feather his fiery dart when he assailed the Son of God, but he must needs strip it and trim it for his purpose. He put the full stop so as to shut out all reference to “ thy ways.” If we go out of our way we go alone ; the angels leave us then to stumble on as best we can, or

it may be they array themselves to hinder us: as when Balaam went out of his way and there stood against him the angel of the Lord, having his sword drawn in his hand, and so it came to pass that Balaam's foot was dashed "against a stone." How, then, may we keep in our way? When the starting-place is the Father's presence, the secret place of the Most High; when we have talked of the way with him who ordereth our steps, and come forth taught of the Lord; when our purpose is in all things to please and honor him; when, whichever way we go, our hearts are set on getting back to him again as the end of our way—then we are not likely to go astray.

"His angels." Of course it means, first and most of all, those ministering spirits who are sent forth from the throne of God; but not those only. He gives all things "charge concerning" his children as his messengers and ministers. "He maketh his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire;" the stormy blasts and fierce flames, the very forces of destruction are among his angels. It is the truth in which St. Paul perpetually triumphs: "All things work together for good to them that love God."

As we have dwelt upon the wonderful kindness and tender care that are revealed in this psalm, we may well have begun to fear lest such love should spoil us. So screened and guarded, what opportunity is there for the nobleness that is born of endurance; for the courage that comes of peril; for the hardier virtues? Fear not; because our God loveth us so well, he loveth us most wisely. Tenderly indeed does he care for his children, yet he knows how to train them as his heroes and kings. Here is the heroism: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." The lion, that is, the monster that comes against us in sheer force of strength, thou hast in God a power to rend him even as did Samson of old. The serpent—the hidden peril that lurks and creeps and springs unawares upon its prey; the subtle sin like that before which Samson fell—thou hast in God a power to trample this, too, under foot. Strength and watchfulness and wisdom are ours and ours perfectly, in his presence and help.

It seems strange that he should deliver u

from the snare of the fowler, and yet should suffer us to meet the lion and the dragon. Herein let us take much comfort. Our God knoweth what temptations to deliver us from ; and he knoweth what temptations to give us the victory over. Think of it, soul, and sing of it as one of the things thou hast to be thankful for—the snares we never knew of ; the baffled plans of the tempter ; the subtle purposes that were defeated ; the fiery darts of the wicked one that our watchful Lord turned aside while we slept. Of Satan also it is true that he proposes and God disposes. And now if against us there come any trial, any suffering, any sorrow, any threatening evil, in this let us find hope and strength : God could have delivered us from it ; that he hath not so delivered us is the very pledge and assurance that he will make us more than conquerors over it. He knows the measure of our foe ; he knows the measure of our strength. Fear not.

Brave men of old believed that the strength of the vanquished became the added strength of the victor, and thus he went from conquering to conquer. It is true to the full of every conflict of the soul. By conflicts like these

our God develops us: teaching us thus of ourselves, of our needs and weakness; teaching us, too, of himself, of his watchfulness and might; and thus he fits us for further and loftier service, and such conflicts and victories as these are the material of which heaven's songs are made. The shouts of victory come only of the battle. Let this, then, be our watchword—it is a promise which we may bear as our shield and buckler: Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder. Whatever threatens now—fierce foe, or trying circumstance, or subtle temptation—fear none of them. Only fear thyself, thy weakness, and thy folly; and let that fear keep thee near to him who is thy stronghold; there shall no evil befall thee.

Then come words so wonderful that we almost fear to speak of them. Our poor thoughts can scarcely reach up to them, and still less can our shallow language hold their fullness. We want a new power of utterance for truths like these. As the telephone annihilates distance, so do we need a cardiphone, an instrument by which heart might speak to heart without the chilling diversion of our words. It is good to think of the Holy Spirit

as such a power ; revealing the love of God not as a thought, a theory, not in word only, but as an inwrought possession : “ the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us.” Let us ask for his grace and power as we seek to enter into this mystery of love.

“ Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him : I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.”

There is an amazing boldness in these words, boldness that could belong only to the man who has hidden in the secret place, and who has looked forth upon all his goodness. We hear the most High God talking over his purpose concerning his child. We know what it is to think over our plans for our children, and to see what we can do for them ; but if our power were only one with our will, what should we do for them then ? Here it is so ; perfect love plans, while perfect power waits to carry out the purpose. My soul, think how thy God longs to have thee utterly and altogether as his own, that he may see fulfilled in thee his largest desires.

“ I will deliver him.” Perfect safety is our

first blessing, the blessing of Benjamin—"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord Jehovah shall cover him all the day long." My soul, lie down in the assurance of safety pledged by all these promises, for now is it the delight of his love to deliver thee. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath thee are the everlasting arms. Who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord!

"I will set him on high because he hath known my name." How high is that which God counts high? Measure by this the vastness of his purposes concerning us. That on which the heart is set shall be the heart's possession and resting-place, and God himself shall be our glorious satisfaction.

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him." Love may sleep through the wild howling of the winds and roll of thunder, or amid the hubbub of the city and its roar of traffic. But let the little one wake with but the faint beginning of a cry, and the mother's love springs up with eagerness. And, quick

to answer as to hear—"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him."

"I will be with him in trouble." What springs of precious consolation lie in these words! That saying is true: "Trouble never comes single;" every trouble brings God with it—as of old time, when men believed that where the poison grew there grew its antidote beside it, ever ready with its healing. "I will be with him." Our gracious God comes ever with his own consolation. He himself is our Comforter.

When we can go on our ways he gives his angels charge concerning us—just as the mother bids the nursemaid take care of the little one; to keep it out of winds, and find the sunny path, and to avoid the perils of the crowded streets. But to-night the cheek is flushed, the head droops, the eyes are heavy, the hot breaths come and go quickly; and now the little one can find no rest but in the mother's arms, and the only soothing is in the sound of her voice and the touch of her gentle hand. "I will be with the little one to-night," says the mother. Even so tender and pitiful is our God. "I will be with him in

trouble." The angels may protect and minister in a thousand gracious ways, but trouble makes us so sacred that God himself comes then to soothe and cheer us.

"I will deliver him, and honor him." Think again, what is that which God counts honor? Think how God looks down on our courtly shows and pageants—so short-lived; with burdened hearts beneath the splendid robes, and a thousand common wants; seeing the sorrow and the strife that lie behind it all; the dust and darkness on to which it all is passing. What, then, is the honor that God gives? How lofty, how real, how abiding! Be ambitious, soul, and carry thyself as one for whom such great things are in store.

"With long life will I satisfy him." Satisfy. That is God's own word, that none else can use rightly. The life that satisfies must have depth, and height, and breadth; and now to these God promises this also—length of days. "I will show him my salvation"—be showing him my salvation. The idea seems to be of that which God shall be opening up to us through the ages, for ever and for ever unfolding it. Think of Moses climbing the mount,

while at every point some new beauty of the goodly Canaan opens before him—the plains dotted with the flocks that lie down in green pastures, the hill-sides terraced with the vineyards, the valleys covered with the golden corn, the homesteads screened by leafy shelter from the noontide heat. And as Moses looks forth upon the vast expanse we can think how all his heart yearned for another land of promise, a place of rest and peace. There fell upon him tenderly the voice that bade him “Come up higher.” And he passed up to the mount of the Lord, to look forth upon the fuller beauty and the richer blessedness of the heavenly Canaan, and to find it all his own. So let us think of heights for us, too, leading on to further heights—possessions which by our very use and enjoyment of them develop new faculties and other powers; and by and by for the new fitness there waits a new possession, up to which our God leads us. “My child,” he saith, “all this is thine.” And so again the new inheritance; and yet again the new development, the further growth, the unfolding of fresh capacities, until again, far on in the ages, it is spoken:

“Come up higher; this is thine.” Then, wondering at such unwearied love, we ask amazed: “Gracious Father, will thy love never be satisfied?” And the answer comes: “Never, my child, never. My love to thee is infinite.”

CHAPTER VII.

MY LORD AND MY GOD.

ST. JOHN XX, 28.

HE has not entered into the mystery of the blessed life who has not learned to say this with all the strength of mind and heart. "My Lord and my God." We must know Christ the Lord as our own, our very own, taking him all to ourselves. My Lord, in perfect fitness and correspondence to my nature and my wants. My Lord, in the constancy of his presence with me, and in the completeness of his help. My Lord, in the fullness of his claim upon my love and faith and service. My Lord, in my appropriating him, having and holding him as wholly mine. Let us muse upon this until the fire kindle—how the gracious Lord comes to each of us in the distinctness of our character and in the separateness of our circumstances, and teaches us each to say, "My Lord and my God."

What have we until we have learned to say this?

Think of Thomas the disciple, the apostle—Saint Thomas, if you will; yet, so long as he stopped short of this, his high position and privilege availed him nothing. We envy him his knowledge of the Lord; the look, the tones, the manner, the words, the doings, all were vivid in his mind. Yet all these memories only confused and bewildered him as he looked back upon them. He knew all about Jesus, but that knowledge left him lonely and despairing. He moved as in a dream; with all things wrapped in mist. His soul put forth trembling buds of hope, and then an icy fear swept over him and all was dead again. Alas, poor Thomas! A little to be blamed perhaps, yet wholly to be pitied. Ah, are there not to-day hosts of men and women like him? Men and women to whom Christ is only a Christ that was; they treasure his story, but they never know his presence. He is a memory; a text for endless sermons; a name on which to rest our creeds and theories. And such a knowledge leaves them as it left Thomas: in loneliness, in fear, haunted ever with doubt and failure.

But think of Thomas after this experience. He has put forth the finger and touched the wound-print. He has thrust his hand into that sacred side. Then all the heart leaped up and cried, "My Lord and my God!" Joyful assurance like a tide swept and surged about his soul, filling every crevice and cranny with triumph. Every perception, every faculty of the mind was filled and satisfied by that vision of the Lord. "My Lord." Not dead; himself; and now so much more than he was before! He has overcome death. He has proved himself triumphant over chief priests and Roman soldiers. He has conquered the powers of darkness; and now his great love, stronger than death and mightier than the grave, brings him back into the midst of his mourning disciples. "My Lord." What cannot he do! Now every hope lives again. Now is every dream and desire of the soul made possible. All within him was filled and thrilled and fired by the possession of such a Saviour. And all that this precious Lord is the disciple holds as his own; my Lord and my God.

Now that is where the Lord seeks to bring each one of us—right up to the point of this

glad possession. Until we get there our religion cannot but be a sickly, sunless thing—little more than a fear and a failure. But think of the wealth of blessedness that is ours when the heart can say, “My Lord and my God.” Not a dead Christ, not a memory, not afar off, but the Saviour mine ; more close and intimate and constant than any other can be. My Lord, revealing himself to me as I need to know him. My Lord, gathering to himself by the constraint of his love all my love as his own ; teaching me to find the brightness of his presence in all the common things of life ; teaching me to bring all these common things into his service. My Lord, by such amazing proofs and pledges of love. My Lord, that I may find a heaven of rest in his care, a heaven of activity in his service, a heaven of joy in his presence. That is what the Lord would be to us.

Now the Lord brings us to say this.

Nothing would have been easier than for Christ to have attested himself to be the Lord and the God. How splendid a triumph might he have achieved over death and hell, in sight of the assembled thousands there, on Calvary ! Even while yet he hung upon the cross, think

how that very cross might have become his throne of dazzling splendor, arched by troops of angels, and up from the depths came death, discrowned and scepterless, while there, before the hosts of the people, hushed and terrified, he might have stood "clothed with white raiment and girt with a golden girdle; his face like the sun in its strength, his eyes a flame of fire," while with a great voice as of a trumpet he proclaims himself, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of hell and of death." Then Thomas could not have doubted; then Mary could not have wept. Why not thus? Because that majesty and splendor would never have won the glad utterance, "My Lord and my God." That awful glory would have thrust itself in between the Lord and the disciple; it would have silenced and rebuked the tender familiarity that took him for its own. "I fell at his feet as dead," writes St. John, when thus he saw the Lord. No; all that would have confirmed their faith in him as the Lord and the God, but that never could have led to this exultant possession. He must come to each, separately and

apart, for that. He must reveal himself as a living presence, winning his way perhaps differently to each heart. He must come in the still hour and stand knocking and entreating, "Open unto me, and I will come in and sup with thee." In such direct personal communion, in such sweet and sacred fellowship, in such contact and familiarity with him, in such giving himself to us as our own—thus and thus only do we learn to say, "My Lord and my God."

In Christ there is the perfected humanity which makes him one with every man.

Think how we differ among ourselves. Think of differences of race, of nations; think of social differences; think of the infinite variety there is in character. Difference in stature is a measure of inches, but who can measure the difference in souls? Here are possibilities of such heights and depths of endurance, of devotion, of love, of hatred, of cruelty; the soul can soar beyond the loftiest mountain peak and sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, or here and now it may sink away down into such depths that no nethermost hell is deeper or darker or hides more

dreadful secrets than the soul may do. How are we shut away from each other! how few we ever know, and how few know us! Now and then we foreigners and strangers meet with some one who speaks our mother-tongue. We understand them at once, instinctively, and they understand us. Then there is fellowship. Fellow—it implies fitness; co-respondence—it answers to us; and some inner door of the heart is opened. But in Jesus Christ is the completed human nature that is broken up and divided among us. He is the blessed Fellow-man who fits us every one. He understands us perfectly and answers to us. He comes to each of us as none other can ever come, saying: “I am thy Friend, thy Brother. I understand thee, and can come and be at home with thee in the innermost chamber of thine heart.” Here nationality is lost—there is neither Jew nor Greek. Here social distinctions cease to divide—there is neither bond nor free. Here external conditions vanish—there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision. Here natural divisions no longer separate—there is neither male nor female. Look at Christ in contact with individual cases. Take, for instance,

the case of the disciples, and see how he led them one by one to himself. They were very unlike each other. Thomas and Peter were as wide asunder as the poles: Peter, swift, impulsive, rash; Thomas, slow, hesitating, and doubtful, they saw things very differently. In those disputes which arose between them sometimes, it is easy to see that each of these would say of the other, "I cannot understand him." Thomas must have often wished that Peter would not talk so much. And Peter must have often thought Thomas dreadfully reserved. Yet each could come to say perfectly, "My Lord and my God." Then there was John, looking into the heart of things and seeing them at a glance. How different from Philip, who needed to have things made very plain before he could see them at all! Now look at the all-wise Master dealing with these, bringing them each one to himself just according to their separate characters. John was ever the see-er. His emblem was of old the eagle, soaring upward, gazing on the sun. His testimony is always of that which he has seen. "I John saw" is the phrase which is ever on his lips. How does the Lord Jesus meet this

see-er? One day about ten o'clock—for John sees the time as he sees all else—Jesus is walking in the distance. The Baptist points this disciple of his to the Saviour, and says, "See the Lamb of God." Then John followed Jesus. Presently those eyes met; the blessed Master turning and looking down into the depths of the soul. "Whom seekest thou?" asked Jesus. "Master, where dwellest thou?" cries the eager disciple. "Come and see," said Jesus. And he abode with him that day. Now Andrew has gone in search of Simon, and tells him, "We have found the Christ." And as Simon comes with parted lips, swift to speak, Jesus does not ask him a question. He knows Peter's hasty speech. Jesus greets him with words that bewilder him into silence—words which perhaps came back long afterward, when hope had nearly gone out, and helped to kindle it afresh, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, A stone." And remembering those eyes which searched him then, it may well have been that long afterward—as he turned to meet that same gaze, greeted by that same name, Simon, son of Jonas—the memory of these

words came back to prompt the reply, "Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee."

Then comes Philip. He was a man diffident ; never the man to lead ; needing a show of authority—a man who would falter over an invitation, while he would promptly obey a command. As Jesus comes with John and Andrew and Simon he feels there is proof enough to satisfy him, and to him is spoken the word exactly adapted to his character. Brief, tender, authoritative, the command is given, "Follow me."

Then there is Nathanael—thoughtful, spiritual, meditative. He lightly passes by the word of Philip : "Nazareth ! nay, no good thing ever came out of Nazareth." No curiosity prompts him to go forth and see. He must have more than a command. Christ meets him at once, right away, in the depths of his spirit : "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wert under the fig tree, I saw thee"—when thou wert reading the Scriptures and seeking guidance concerning these things, my Spirit met thine. Then all Nathanael's soul went out to Christ in adoring confidence :

“Thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel!”

Take another illustration of this truth: that wherever Christ went he made every sufferer feel that he could do exactly what each needed. At once, instinctively, every needy one felt, “He can help *me* ;” and each came to know him as *my* Lord, *my* Friend, *my* Healer.

Here is the leper; a hopeless case if ever there was one. Incurable, and much more than that; making the sufferer to be abhorred and dreaded. But a passing glimpse of that face, the sound of that voice borne on the breeze, was enough. All within him felt that here was the very help he wanted. Watching his opportunity, he springs from his hiding-place and falls at the Master’s feet. “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Here is Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. All hope of the little maiden’s life has ebbed away; death steals over the threshold, and who can stay him? Yet even in so desperate case Jairus cannot doubt. “Come and lay thine hand upon her, and she shall live.” There is the poor woman whose twelve years of suffering might well have crushed all hope. But as she

thinks of him, hope at once springs up again. "If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole." Here are the disciples tossed upon the sea amid blustering winds and threatening waves, and the storm growing more furious. Why wake Jesus? Sailors have little faith in the skill of landsmen; they can handle an oar, and manage the helm, and take in a reef. They felt instinctively, irresistibly, that he could help them. And up he rose against that stormy sky and amid those tumbling seas, "Peace, be still." And instantly the winds and waves sank down, abashed that they should have dealt so roughly with the Lord.

Once, and only once, there came one with some doubt; with a word of hesitancy, as if not quite sure that Jesus could help him. It was the case of the man who went to the disciples before he found Jesus, and who got his heart chilled and his faith dimmed by their failure. He spoke with a faltering, "If Thou canst do any thing." At once Jesus took his "if" and put it where only it ever can be—in us, not in him; "If thou canst believe."

Again, see how the Lord deals with the two who come before us in this chapter—Mary Magdalene and Thomas. In the one case that is expressly bidden which in the other case is expressly forbidden. She who would touch, must not. He who would not, may. Look at the two cases. Mary Magdalene lingers in the garden blinded by her grief. There before her stands the risen Lord, but she thinks it is the gardener. If the Saviour cannot reach her heart in one way, he will seek another; and if the eye know him not, he will appeal to the ear. He speaks to her with the old familiar tone of love. “Mary!” At once she is at his feet with joyful adoration. “My Master!” “Touch me not,” said Jesus. “I am not yet ascended to my Father.” It meant the tenderest care for her—as if he said: “Already at my going thine heart has been broken; and now to know me again in any bodily presence will be only to renew thy grief. Wait until I ascend to my Father; and then, when the Holy Ghost is given, thou shalt know me in a deep, abiding, spiritual union that shall never be broken.” But to Thomas the word is,

“Reach hither thy finger; stretch forth thine hand.” He is of another material; that bodily contact shall help the spiritual union. Then as the finger rested on that wound-print, and as the hand was laid against that sacred side, all his soul exulted in conscious possession of the risen Saviour—“My Lord and my God!”

Do not think that all this was possible for those early disciples, and for those sufferers of old, in some easier way than it is for us to-day. Do not think for a moment that this conscious personal possession was made easier by his bodily presence. Far otherwise. Then Christ stood in a crowd observed by many eyes; shut off by some distance from even those nearest to him; passing occasionally out of the midst of those who were most intimate with him. But the work of the Holy Spirit is much more directly a separate and personal work. Now no longer in the crowd, now no more as one of many, is Christ made known to us. He comes to us away, alone, and by ourselves: “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode

with him." A presence possessed by us as my Lord is now the very promise that he waits to fulfill. It is this direct personal and individual dealing that distinguishes the work of the Holy Ghost. A distinct and separate act of conviction is wrought in every case of penitence, and often wrought in very different ways. A distinct manifestation of God's love to us in Christ Jesus is given to each forgiven one. In each believer there is wrought a distinct and personal confidence—that the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. To each child of God is given the boldness that claims God in the tenderest relationship, and with the fullest right to all that he is and has. Because we are sons God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son, crying, Abba, Father.

Be bold, then, to think of the Lord as "My Lord and my God." Beware of reading or thinking about the blessed life as if it could be yours by agreeing with certain human theories and opinions about it. It is only in a personal possession of Christ the Lord. It is what he seeks to give us, and what he will give to each one of us if we do but fully

receive him. Take him and trust him as your own; wholly and perfectly your own—understanding you apart from all others, knowing exactly how to teach you and to help you. Now let your heart take up the glorious possession. He has given himself for us, that he may give himself to us. And now he waits for you to accept him as your own—all yours, and always, altogether yours—yours to do for you exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSECRATED AND TRANSFORMED.

“ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world : but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”—ROM. xii, 1, 2.

THE key of this chapter does not hang in the door. It is found in the last verse of the previous chapter : “ Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Every thing comes from God ; every thing fills its intended purpose by the wisdom and energy of God ; every thing comes back again to find its end, as its beginning, in God. This is the law of the universe, the great march of all things : from God, through God, to God.

But of all things about us this is a necessity. They cannot fly from their appointed ends. Ever wrought upon by a great compul-

sion, they must ; while we are marked off by this dignity and greatness : that to us this service is of choice, of will. We are sons, not servants. We choose where they must. To us it is an intelligent surrender, a "reasonable service." We are besought where all else are compelled. From reason, not from blind necessity, we present ourselves to the sweep and action of this great law.

And yet, though it is a reasonable service, it is a subject of entreaty : "I beseech you." We naturally object to be besought to do a reasonable thing. Show us that a thing is reasonable, and at once and of course we do it. That is "only reasonable," we say of a proposal ; and, without more ado, the matter is settled, of course and beyond appeal. Think, then, that for our highest good and loftiest life we have to be besought ! Should it not shame us, and humble and hurt us, that for God alone we play not the part of reasonable men ? Here only are we blind and fools. It is amazing that the possibility of such blessedness as this does not draw us eagerly to its possession ; that we should have to be urged, entreated, driven, when God invites us

to give ourselves wholly to him that he may give himself wholly to us! Listen to the music of the words: "that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Alas! the words reach us, and the soul finds in them no dawn of heaven's own splendor. The ear does not hear in them the very voice of God, calling us into paradise again. We stand blinded, and see not how there is held out to us here the golden key of heaven itself! Here is reason not only not a guide; it ceases even to prompt us. Alas, that it should be so! As if the humanity which God fashioned for communion with himself should be paralyzed, unconscious, dead only when he appeals to us. Ambitious enough for the paltry distinctions of the earth, but for these high honors needing to be entreated, and urged; greedy after earthly good, here, only, needing to be besought and driven. O that we could feel the plaintive grief, the shameful upbraiding, that lie in this call, "I beseech you!"

This is the entreaty of a man who was living this life of blessedness. He had given himself right up altogether to God; body,

soul, and spirit. And now he was filled with the conscious strength and triumph of this sublime unity. His life was full-orbed and rounded perfectly. Every thought, every aim, every desire had in it the might of God ; of God, and through God, and to God, was the beat of every pulse, and the throb of every thought, and the life of every desire, and the strength of every work. This was the rhythmic flow of his whole being. There was of necessity in this man a constant sense of triumph. He walked the earth with such a firm step, knowing whose world it is and that it is well put together, as if under his feet were the granite of eternal truth or the pure gold of God's eternal love. He moved about with a calm untroubled confidence, quite sure that all things were working together for the glory of the Lord, and for his good. There sang ever in his soul the music of those who serve God day and night in his holy temple. And then, in all the consciousness of this blessed life, he thinks of the half-hearted, of those who come far enough out of the far country to lose the husks of the swine, but not far enough to get the bread of the father's

house. If pity is anywhere, keep it for these ; none need it more. These are the miserable people of the world, who admit the claims of God, and yet do not give themselves up to them ; who pull for heaven, and yet do not cast off the rope that holds them to the shore. Like the fabled coffin of Mohammed, these people are neither in earth nor heaven, but lie suspended between the two, unclaimed by either, and yet fretting for each. The apostle's soul is stirred within him, and at once with a demand and an entreaty he cries : " I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye give yourselves right up and wholly to God ! " If this religion is worth any thing it is worth all the mind and heart and strength that we can put into it.

Again, it is the entreaty of a man who had lingered at the cross until its great love possessed him. He had seen into the bitter sorrow of the Son of God ; his dreadful shame and agony. He had seen something of the vastness and glorious purpose of God's unspeakable gift. He had looked out toward the boundless possibilities that are opened to us all in him. With that mercy filling every

thought and kindling his soul he turns to himself and to us: What return, what acknowledgement, can any of us make? There can be but one answer: Ourselves; all that we have and are and can be, presented a living sacrifice unto our God. We are besought, we are bound by that infinite love. There is a compulsion mightier in its force than that which controls all things, infinitely loftier in its origin, infinitely nobler in its purpose: the compulsion of love. The power that prompts this consecration, and the power that sustains it, is here and only here: the love of God to us in Christ Jesus the Lord. There let us seek it. Our resolutions are choked by the rank undergrowth of weeds; our purposes wither when the sun is up. By that love, by that grief, by that agony, by that dreadful death, this entreaty comes to us. The cross is the eternal beseeching of God. And only by that love, that deliverance, by the power and hope which the cross brings to us, are we made strong and steadfast for this consecration.

Look at the consecration to which we are urged: "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . unto God."

We will turn again to the great law of all things and trace its application. There are two parts of it which illustrate the two leading thoughts of this passage—sacrifice and transformation. We will take these two separately.

The first part is this—that nothing in God's world is any good until it is given up to that which is above it.

What is the worth of the land, however fruitful, and whatever title we may have to it, unless we can do something with it? "Of course," you say. But why of course? Underneath that "of course" lies the law of which we speak. The soil must minister to us or it is no good—merely waste land. It must grow its grass or flowers or trees, it must yield us foundation for our buildings, or minerals and metals for our use, or it is of no service, and so no good. The seed again, and all its products—corn, and grass, and fruit, and tree—what should we give for them if we could do nothing with them? They must yield themselves in turn to the animal life, or else more directly minister to our wants. In this lies their worth, their good. And the

cattle and sheep, what are all the flocks and all the herds, except as they clothe us, and feed us, and minister to us? And we, what are we for? Here lies our worth and our good: in giving ourselves a living sacrifice to God. This is our service. Waste and worthless are we except as we give ourselves up to him who is above us; discerning and fulfilling his will concerning us, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.

Then comes the second part of this law, completing it; every thing by sacrifice not lost, but turned into higher life. Very beautiful is this law of transformation.

Listen to the parable of the earth, as it lies far down beneath the blue heaven, or as in the cold night it looks up at the silver stars. "Here am I," it mutters, "so far away from him who made me. The grass blades and the flowers lift up their heads and whisper to the breeze, the trees go far up into the golden sunshine, the birds fly up against the very heaven, the clouds are touched sometimes with glory as if they caught the splendor of the King, the stars are bright as if they shone with the light of his presence. And I am

down here ! How can I ever climb up to him who made me ? ” And then the poor earth sighs again : “ And that is not all—not even the worst of it. I am only dull soil, without any beauty of form, or richness of color, or sweetness of smell ! All things seem full of loveliness but me. How can I ever be turned into worth and blessedness ? ”

And now there comes the seed, and it is hidden in the earth. “ Earth,” whispers the seed, “ wilt thou give me thy strength ? ”

“ No, indeed,” replies the earth ; “ why should I give thee my strength ? It is all I have got, and I will keep it for myself.”

“ Then,” saith the seed, “ thou shalt be earth, and only earth, for ever and ever. But if thou wilt give me thy strength thou shalt be lifted up into another life.”

So the earth yields, and gives up its strength to the seed. And the seed takes hold of it and lifts it up and begins to turn it into a hundred forms of beauty ; it rises with wondrous stem ; it drinks in sunshine and rain and air, mingling them with the earth’s strength and changing all to toughened branch or dainty leaf, to rich flower or ripened fruit.

Then its work is done as it ends in the seed. And it cries to the earth: "Spake I not truly? Thou art not lost, but by sacrifice transformed to higher life, to worth and beauty."

The parable repeats itself in the case of the seed. Take up a handful of the corn. "Is it alive?" you ask. Yes, with a kind of life, but all unconscious. It cannot see or hear or move. But it yields itself to the animal, and then its strength is turned into part of the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the subtle nerve, the beating heart. And the animal gives itself in turn to serve man, and is exalted to a thousand higher purposes. It yields its strength to him, and it ministers to the thinking brain, the skillful hand, the strength that sways, that serves, and blesses.

And man gives himself up to God, to love him, to learn his will and do it, and is transformed—into what? Ah! who can tell of that wondrous transformation when it is completed? We think of the redeemed and glorified, white-robed and pure, untouched by sorrow, unstained by sin, into whose minds there entereth nothing that defileth, in whose heart no unlovely thing can find a lodging-place,

who day and night are there before the throne, standing in the very light of God's own glorious presence, and serving him with a perfect service, unwearied, unbroken, amid the angels that do excel in strength ! Do you ask who are these, and whence came they ? These but yesterday were here as we are, earth-stained, commonplace, burdened men and women, tempted and afraid, selfish, sinful ; without beauty or worth were they too. But they gave themselves up to God, and now are they like him, for they see him as he is. By sacrifice not lost, but transformed to higher life.

Once, when I was a school-boy going home for the holidays, I had a long way to go to reach the far-away little town in which I dwelt. I arrived at Bristol, and got on board the steamer with just money enough for my fare, and that being settled I thought, in my innocence, I had paid for every thing I needed in the way of meals. I had what I wanted so long as we were in smooth water ; then came the rough Atlantic, and the need of nothing more. I had been lying in my berth for hours, wretchedly ill, and past caring for any thing,

when there came the steward and stood beside me.

"Your bill, sir," said he, holding out the piece of paper.

"I've got no money," said I in my wretchedness.

"Then I shall keep your luggage. What is your name and address?"

I told him. Instantly he took off the cap he wore, with the gilt band about it, and held out his hand: "I should like to shake hands with you," he said with a smile.

I gave him my hand, and shook his as well as I could. Then came the explanation: how that, some years before, some little kindness had been shown his mother by my father in the sorrow of her widowhood. "I never thought the chance would come for me to repay it," said he pleasantly; "but I am glad it has."

"So am I," said I.

As soon as I got ashore I told my father what had happened. "Ah," said he, "see how a bit of kindness lives! Now he has passed it on to you. Remember, if ever you meet any body that needs a friendly hand, you must pass it on to them."

Years had gone by. I had grown up and quite forgotten it all, until one day I had gone to the station of one of our main lines. I was just going to take my ticket when I saw a little lad crying—a thorough man, he was, trying bravely to keep back the troublesome tears, as he pleaded with the booking-clerk.

“What is the matter, my lad?” I asked.

“If you please, sir, I haven’t money enough to pay my fare. I have all I want but a few pence, and I tell the clerk if he will trust me I will be sure to pay him again.”

Instantly back upon me flashed the forgotten story of long ago. Here, then, was my chance of passing it on. I gave him the sum he needed, and got into the carriage with him. Then I told the little fellow the story of long ago, and of the steward’s kindness to me. “Now, to-day,” I said, “I pass it on to you; and remember, if you meet with any one that needs a kindly hand, you must pass it on to them.”

“I will, sir,” cried the lad, as he took my hand, and his eyes flashed with earnestness.

“I am sure you will,” I answered.

I reached my destination, and left my little

friend. The last sign I had of him was as the handkerchief fluttered from the window of the carriage, as if to say: "It is all right, sir; I will pass it on."

My simple story is the poor and broken illustration of the law of God's great kindness that runs through all things. Here lies the earth, and it says: "I have got in me some strength. It belongs to God. It came down from him to me by a host of gracious messengers—the seasons, and the sunshine, and the rain." Then it whispers to the seed: "I will pass it on to you, and if you can pass it on further you will; wont you?" Then the seed takes it up, and carries it higher, and it says: "I have some strength in me. It belongs to God. It came down from him to the earth, and the earth has passed it on to me." And the seed whispers to the animal: "I will pass it on to you, and if you get a chance of passing it on you will; wont you?" And in turn the animal ministers to man, and it says: "I have some strength in me. It came down from God, and it belongs to him. The earth has passed it on to the seed, and the seed has passed it on to me, and now I pass it on to

you. If you can pass it on further you will; wont you?" And as the man comes in, and with a conscious and reasonable service yields himself to God, then do all things flow back again to their Creator.

So man completes the circle. He is the last link in it all. Think how all things minister to him—the light, the air, the earth; the growth of tree, and fruit, and flower; the strength and life of things about him. Think how the ages wait upon him. How the slow action of centuries has ground the rock to soil, and how the soil has been wrought upon by wind, and rain, and changes of the seasons, till it is fit for the seed. And how the seed gathers up this vast preparation, and passes it on to man. All things reach up to him; all things wait upon him: "Thou hast put all things under his feet." If he serves not God, he hinders all things, and diverts them. If he yields himself to God, then does he stand as the high-priest of nature, arrayed in the garments of praise, and consecrates all things to the Creator. It is a cry taken up and urged by the voice of all things—the sun in the heavens, the air we breathe, the food we

eat, the earth we tread upon, the things we handle, all that eye can rest upon, and that ear can listen to, repeat this word, each adding to its reasonableness, each demanding it as a right: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . unto God." Then, and then only, do all things find their purpose and their glorious end. "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Next, the result of this consecration—"Be not conformed to this world." How great a drop is this! We were dreaming of heaven; our thoughts were all taken up with the sublime hope of being made like unto the Son of God. Then comes this sudden fall to a commonplace of morality—a mere copy-slip heading! And it is the first of a series of such little moralities: Be not wise in your own conceits. Be given to hospitality. Be not slothful in business. Live peaceably with all men. But that this should seem a coming down makes the lesson all the more needful. All this is full of weighty meaning. Do we not too often think that our way upward is,

first to be right with ourselves ; and then to be right with the world ; and then somewhere far off we may some day come to be right with God ? No ; the order is reversed. This is the only way upward : first right with God ; then, and then only, right with all things. First “ present your bodies a living sacrifice ” unto God ; then the world and all belonging to it is put in its right place. Sin created nothing new, and it took away nothing of what God had created. But it put man out of harmony with God. Then at once man was out of harmony with himself, and with every thing about him. All things are adjusted to God’s will. This is the end as it is the source of all things. Man only has broken loose from his place ; and as soon as ever he is where he should be, he fits in with all things, and all things fit in with him. When he loves God, there is a perfect harmony—“ all things work together for good.” This, then, is the first great step, and not the last ; the very beginning of the life of God lies here, and all else shall follow of necessity : “ Present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . unto God.”

How vain are all other attempts at curing conformity to the world! Perhaps there never was a time when there were so many Christians as there are to-day. Certainly there never was a time when there were so many home-made Christians as there are to-day; man-made, church-made Christians. Who does not know the receipt? Tie up the hands and say: "Sir, you must not do that." Tie up his feet and say: "You mustn't go to such and such places—at least, when you are at home." Gag his mouth; blind his eyes; stop his ears; cut him off from certain things at which society is shocked, and there is your Christian: a creature with his heart hungering for the world as fiercely as ever, and whose only evidence of any earnestness is in a constant discussion as to whether there is any harm in a score of questionable or unquestionable things that he desires, and in the sincerity of his complaint that they are forbidden. Can we wonder at the general notion that religion is a thing of hardships and restraints? To present our bodies a living sacrifice to the opinions of religious society is no cure for conformity to the world. This is the

only way—a glad, complete, whole-hearted giving up of ourselves to God. Then comes the being “transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Transformed, not from without but from within; exactly as the earth is transformed when it gives itself up to the seed. The contrast between the two words “conformed” and “transformed” is very much stronger and more definite as St. Paul stated it. But the word “transformed” is, literally, metamorphosed. It implies an organic result. This is the very idea and heart of Christianity. It is not only an example of true life. It is not only a revelation of new purposes and motives. It is a power to which we can surrender ourselves, which can take us up and transform us into a newer and higher life—even the life of God.

“That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The renewed mind has new faculties of discernment. There is a clear perception and appreciation of the will of God; new eyes to see it, and a new heart to do it and to be it. We cannot know God’s will until we are given up to it. Once as I meditated on these words I

heard the children pass my study door, and among them was a little maiden of three or four, who was speaking angrily. "I sha'n't," rang out the little voice. I opened the door and called her in. "This wont do," said I, gravely; "you must stand in the corner until you come to a better mind." And with a saddened face the little offender crept to the corner and set herself in the angle of the wall, and put the tiny hands behind her back, and sighed. "Think now," said I to myself, "if she put on a tone half-injured and half-submissive, and should say: 'Well, I suppose it is my father's will, and I must submit to it,' should I not answer, amused at such mistaken meekness: 'Nay, little one, you are wrong. It is altogether against your father's will. Your father's will is that you should be in the garden shouting and playing with the others, as merry as you can live; but you have gone against your father's will and now your father's will has gone against you'?"

And as I turned it over I thought I saw where all the crosses come from. When God's will goes one way and ours goes another there is the cross. When God's will and mine

are one the cross is lost. There never need be a cross at all; if there is we must take it up; but it is our fault if there is, and only ours. "No cross no crown" is on many ancient bookmarks, but it is not in the Bible. We made the one great cross which Christ hath borne for us, and now if our will be altogether one with God's will there is no cross for us to carry, and already the crown is ours.

Already the crown is ours—for, what makes heaven? Not white robes, not golden streets, not harps and anthems. Get in at some thought of it that shall satisfy us. What makes heaven? Is it not this—this only: the eternal harmony of wills! God's will and man's will forever flowing on together, making heaven's music. "Why," you say, "I may have that down here." Of course we may, blessed be God! It is the golden key of heaven itself which is held out to us here, and we may enter in and dwell in the rest and joy of the paradise of God.

And what is hell? God grant we may never know. I can think that hell is the eternal collision of wills. Man's will forever rising up defiant of God's will. And God, in his

majestic authority, forever putting down the rebel will of man. Ah, you think, we may have that here! We may; and this it is that makes the madness and distraction of many a human life. All things else have some rest, some harmony; but how many a human soul is tossed and torn and rent by this defiance of God and his will!

And now, dear reader, here is a thing to be done. It shall help us nothing—only, indeed, hinder and burden us—to know all this, to believe it all, and yet stop short of doing it. Better never to have heard it than to leave it a mere text for a sermon. Listen once more to the appeal: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” What a grim and hideous mockery it is if any man should content himself with reading this exposition of the text, as if that were all! Reader, it is a thing to be done. Will you do it? You will find it well and helpful to make it a formal act. Write out the text as a message from God requiring an answer. Think of all that it means, and then write

your reply in God's own presence. To have it deliberately written in black and white is to make the act so much more definite and so much more real. Set the date upon it, and then sign your name as having made yourself over to God. Do it now, while yet the thought is in the mind, and the holy purpose prompts you. Do it in sight of the cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, finding alike the strength of this entreaty and the strength for your own consecration and faithfulness in "the mercies of God." Do not look for any great manifestation or sudden change. Your part is the surrender of yourself to God; if you do your part, be quite sure that he will do his. The renewing of the mind is a gradual and continuous work. Only let us so live as to let God have his own way with us, and then be assured that the transformation is begun, and will go on until we be made in all things and altogether like unto our blessed Lord, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND HIM—BEFORE HIM.

THE words occur in St. Luke's gospel : "And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment : and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd. And Jesus said, Who touched me ? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me ? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me : for I have perceived that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort : thy faith hath made thee whole ; go in peace."

She came behind him. But the Lord Jesus could not suffer her to stay there—unwelcomed, never seeing his face, never hearing his voice, never knowing the great love that filled his heart toward her ; knowing only the healing virtue that lay in the fringe of his garment, and taking it, like a guilty thing, by stealth. He could not let her go away thus. He could not rest, himself, could not let her rest, until he brought her round before him.

There are many behind him, afraid. The blessed life is ever before him. Let us follow the story. It was away in one of the little fishing towns on the Sea of Galilee. About the rough stone pier the groups of fishermen gather ; and there are the boats, and sails, and nets, and all the fishing gear. The narrow street goes sloping up from the water's edge. Here is the home of Jairus : very sad are all within there. The only daughter, a little maiden of twelve, lies dying. All hope is gone, they say. Ah ! there goes Jairus himself. Stepping out anxiously from the doorway, pale-faced, red-eyed, he is gone forth to look for Jesus, eagerly hoping to find him before the little daughter has breathed her last.

But our way lies in the poorest part of the town. Here, in a single room, stripped by want, sits a poor woman, wasted and white as death; her sorrow graven deep on her face, and all about her telling of poverty and wretchedness. And sitting here she hears from the court outside the gossip of the neighbors.

“The doctors have given her up,” says one; “she can’t live through the day, they say. And only twelve, poor little thing! Her father is gone out to look for this Jesus of Nazareth who has done so many wonderful cures. A great crowd was waiting for him at the pier when I came by; they say that he is coming across from the Gadarene country.”

“It is wonderful what this great Prophet does,” says the good-wife of next door. “They say that he never sends away any sick without curing them; no matter what ails them, or how long they have been ill, he heals them at once.”

So with the sunshine and the chirping of the birds there came these words upon the poor woman’s soul. She sighs within herself—
“Ah, if I were only like Jairus, only great and

rich as he is! Of course, this wonderful Prophet will go to his house directly—he is the ruler of the Synagogue.”

Then the sad eyes go wandering round the wretched room, and she sighs again. “Ah, if I only had somebody to speak to him for me!” And then she stops. Well she may. Not poor only—much more than that. By the law her sickness made her unclean, defiled. She was forbidden to touch any. And yet she longed to be made whole. She wanted help as much as Jairus did. All her money spent upon the doctors, her strength all gone, and yet work had to be done or she must starve; she needed help and healing if ever any did. Then her face brightens with a new hope. Could she not come near him without his knowing? Of course this holy man would be very angry if he knew it; but she would try and get behind him, and only touch the hem of his garment. He would not know. And then, he was so good it really could not do him any harm. So she rises, determined to go forth and try; saying within herself, “If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole.”

She comes on her way, thinking only of her hinderances and the methods to which they compelled her to resort. She was poor, and she could not expect this Jesus of Nazareth, that every body was talking about, to care for her. She was weak; and the world seemed to be all for the strong, and the pushing, and the clever. And then he was very holy, and she was unclean; she must not let him see her. How angry he would be if knew! If she only touched a priest or a Pharisee it would be dreadful; and he was much holier than they were.

Here is a picture of many timid souls, who never can think that the Lord Jesus cares for them. They do not wonder that he blesses other people. Others are good and wise. Others have faith, earnestness, love! Ah, if they themselves were only like other people, then, they think, they might get any thing. But for such as they are, so weak, and so sinful, and so far off—the promises cannot be meant for them. And if ever they are blest it must be in a kind of hidden way, just a trembling touch of the hem of his garment. They wouldn't presume to ask for more than the

outermost salvation possible. But for that they do long with all their hearts, and they venture forth timidly to look for it. Come, see how these fearing ones may hope to fare.

The woman creeps away out of the court and to the end of the street. And now the crowd is coming. Here are sturdy fishermen who tread on each other's heels. Here are mothers, anxious to let their children look upon the great Prophet; here are lads and maidens thrusting their way through. Poor woman! Weak as she is, what can she expect but to be pushed hither and thither? How can she ever hope to get near him? Then for a moment she has a glimpse of him, so far off from her. And there beside him is Jairus. Ah, if she were only great and rich! Then suddenly, she knows not how, the surging crowd thrust her close to him. The robe sweeps within her reach. Forth goes that withered finger and thumb, and timidly touches the hem of his garment. It was but a moment; and lo, it was all done! Through her she felt the bounding tide of a new life; with a glad new strength, amazing and delicious, she lifts herself up, made whole.

Ah! there is a sight worth looking at. In spite of poverty, and in spite of weakness, and in spite of the crowd, she manages to get to the great Prophet, and is made whole. Thank God, it is always so; always. The earnest search for him can never be in vain. Here success is certain and assured. "Seek, and ye shall find."

Every-where else we may deserve success without winning it, but not here. Never yet did any soul set out earnestly to look for Jesus, in vain. Some angel guide, some silvery star, some Philip waiting in the desert, some vision in the night, some casual word dropped somewhere, some sweet promise spoken to the innermost heart, some unexpected but unmistakable presence of the Lord meets them. He will be found of those who seek him; and, more than that, he doth devise means to restore his banished ones.

She came ignorantly. She came secretly; as if to steal the blessing. She meant to go away again without so much as thanking him. She seems to have had a very superstitious notion of the cloak and its hem. And yet she found him. Ah! they who wait till they can

come perfectly will never come at all. Never mind how you come—only come.

She has got what she wanted, and now, dreading lest he should get to know that she had touched him, she tries to make her way as fast as she can out of the crowd. She is behind him, or she never could have feared. See that gracious Lord as he stands for a moment, every thing about him proclaiming the great love that yearns to bless all men. A face of infinite compassion; eyes that melt with graciousness; lips from which drop such words of yearning pity; hands stretched out in eager readiness to do good—and all the time this poor woman is behind him, trembling lest he should happen to see her! Behind him, and looking only at the hem of his garment!

He could not leave her there. The poorer the comer, the tenderer his welcome; the lower the suppliant, the lower is he ready to stoop. She must see his face; must know his heart. She had sought and taken the blessing as if it were grudged; she must have it with a fullness of grace. She had come with fear and trembling; she must go away

with the music of his words filling her soul—
“Daughter, be of good cheer.”

This is the picture of thousands of earnest but timid souls: they are behind him. They have a salvation, and yet they do not know him. Saved, yet they never see his face, never hear his voice; they have no living communion with him. They think of him, and believe in him, and adore him, as the Son of God who died on the cross in his infinite mercy; and now he has gone up into his high glory to intercede for them, and at last to receive them into his majestic presence. So far away, so poor and fearful, all they can hope for is to touch the healing hem which reaches low enough for their trembling hands. Promises exceeding precious, and prayers, and blessed sacraments, and hallowed means of grace, these are theirs, and through these virtue goes out of him which makes them whole. They hold to the doctrine about him, they celebrate the glorious memory of his death and passion, and look onward to his coming again, and in these they find most truly a healing power. And yet all this can neither satisfy him nor satisfy us.

We touch only that which is outside and away from him. "If a man love me"—not the touch of faith only, not the finger and thumb on the hem of his garment, but *love me*—the whole heart going out after him and finding him, and resting in him—"If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." That is what he seeks, and that is what we need; having not only his healing virtue, but his great love as our own; himself as an abiding presence.

Now Jesus stops in the midst of the surging crowd and looks about him. Silence falls on all as he asks, "Who touched me?" Then comes a longer hush. Poor woman, how her heart thumps within her! How her guilt seizes her and fills her with trembling fear; Then Peter, swift to speak, puts in a word at which she grasps eagerly: "Master, the people throng thee and press thee." But Jesus, still looking about him, saith only, "Somebody hath touched me. I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." How angry Jesus will be with her! How indignant the people will be that she should have touched him!

“And when she saw that she was not hid.” The trembling seeker after Jesus cannot be hid. Jostled, and elbowed in the crowd; timidly crouching at the Master’s back; tremblingly touching the hem of his garment, where no eye can overlook her, and while none suspect; yet she cannot be hid. Ignorant she may be, foolish, sinful, driven hither and thither by the press, yet, blessed be God! the seeker after Jesus cannot be hid.

Then she came trembling, and fell down before him. Now she is in the right place. Behind him she kept her great want hushed up and hidden—her burden of weakness and shame. But now at his feet, before his face, with those pure eyes looking her through and through, what could she do but just tell him all about herself, for what cause she had come, and how she had touched him?

Behind him we cannot see ourselves any more than we can see him. We are in his shadow. Our secret sins are set in the light of his countenance. We may seek a place of repentance with tears, but find none until we fall down before him. We may dwell in the fire of Sinai seeking to get the heart melted;

we may smite at it fiercely with upbraiding and shame, but that will not break it. It is in sight of his holy presence that our sin appears so black and hateful. It is when he bends over us, not in wrath, not in condemnation, but in grief, that our sin begins to hurt us. It is beside his tender patience that we feel the anguish of our quick temper, and our hasty words. It is there, in the very presence of the Truth himself, that we are stricken through and through with our falseness, and foulness, and folly.

And does it seem for a moment to some hasty thought that it might be well for us to be spared such humiliation, alike for our own sake and for others? A great and gracious forgiveness does not need to magnify itself by making the most of the offender. Sun-like, he needs no black foil to set off his grace and bounty. Ah! how far away was his mind from any such thought as this! All his thought, all his heart were with her; eager to bless her, indeed. He was not counting aloud the wealth he was going to give her, but only devising the means by which he could fill her with good things.

Think if she had escaped unnoticed from the crowd; conveying with her the delicious secret of her being made whole, yet going away with that false thought of Jesus: "Ah, if he only knew, what would he say!" Why, she would have lost much more than she found. She would have never known his heart of love.

And think, again, how to her generous womanly heart this very gift of healing behind him might have become—and would, I think—a grievous burden. Henceforth her heart would be bound to him by a deeper interest and an eager regard all the more intense and constant because of its secrecy; bound by that touch as if her trembling hand still held the sacred hem. How she would inquire concerning him! And now think of her coming to hear of his great sorrow, of his rejection by the chief priests and Pharisees, of his awful agony and shame on Calvary—and she had touched him with her defiling hand! had filched from him the gift of healing! There are gifts that come to madden men. And completing the grief would come another thought, and yet a greater burden: "He

healed me, and I never thanked him ! To think that they cried, ' Away with him,' that they mocked him with hoarse voices, that they crucified him ! Ah, how a word of my thanks might have soothed him, and how I might have ministered unto him ! And he is gone ! ”

But let us turn and see how she fares here before him. Her confession is ended ; a dreadful silence falls on the crowd. What will he do ? thinks she, stricken with terror. Will he take away the healing and add to it some new terror, like Gehazi's leprosy ? Then all his great love bent over her—he must surely have laid his hands upon her—spoke to her, with such an infinite compassion as earth had never heard the like of, words that seemed to sink down into her soul, filling her with heaven's own light and music :

“ Daughter, be of good cheer. Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

That is where the blessed Lord is ever seeking to bring us : before him, where we can see his face, where we can hear his voice, where we can have the touch of his hand, and where we can know the greatness of that love which passeth knowledge. He would lift upon us

the light of his countenance and give us peace. This only can satisfy him—this only can satisfy us.

Once more. Before him is the place of usefulness. So long as she was behind him no one but herself knew any thing of her being healed, and her great anxiety was that no one should know. What good could she ever do to any one, a poor weak soul such as she was? Her place was behind him, of course.

There often is a certain selfishness in the earlier stages of salvation. We come to Christ for our own sakes: seeking forgiveness, hope, safety, and perhaps with no thought beyond these. Faith does not fail because the object is a selfish one. The mistake, the sadness, is not when the soul comes thus to Christ—it is when thus it goes away. The mistake is when our blind faith lives on, and there is nothing more; no growing love, no devotion that leaves self more and more behind, the soul stretching out after him. Faith is a failure unless it brings us before him, to pass our life in steadfast love to our dear Lord, and in true helpfulness for others. There, before him, she, poor and

weak, rendered a mighty service for the ruler of the synagogue, who seemed in need of nothing. For while Jesus is busy with her poor Jairus is overwhelmed with the bitter tidings that reach him from home. Through the crowd there comes one who whispers, "Trouble not the Master; thy daughter is dead." It is a scene worth looking at. On one side that presence which throws its black shadow over the ruler; at one ear the words that send despair into his soul. On the other side there is the Light, there is the Lord himself, and on that ear fall the words of authority, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." On one side the sleeve is pulled, and the cold words freeze his soul. On the other side the gracious Master's hand is laid on him. There Jairus sees what faith has done for the afflicted woman. "Believe, only, and thy daughter shall live." And in that hour that poor woman lifted up and strengthened the faith of Jairus to receive his little daughter from the dead.

She lives on, in the traditions of the early Church, ever before him. On that dreadful day when he went forth in the crowd bearing

his cross, in awful shame and agony, it is said that she stepped forth from out that clamorous mob and wiped with loving hands that sacred face, disfigured with sweat and blood. And the oldest Church historian tells that he himself had seen, outside her house in farther Galilee, a bronze image in which she had set forth the memorable scene of her healing ; a perpetual tribute of her love, and a perpetual token of her Saviour's grace and power.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.”—ST. LUKE x, 27.

THESE are wonderful words, perhaps the most wonderful earth ever listened to. If they were not so familiar we should think of them, and if we did but think about them ever so little they could scarcely fail to fill us with amazement.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” These words never came from men. Earth never could have heard them if they had not come down from heaven. They are far away from our thoughts and our ways; a whole heaven above them. There are among us many voices that say, “Thou shalt:” the voice of the master, “Thou must serve me;” the king’s voice, “I am thy sovereign, honor me;” the demand of the tyrant, “I am mightier than thou art, do my will;” the

priest's cry, "These are thy gods; bring sacrifice and offering, and fear before them."

But love; what has love to do with the busy, the ambitious, the great? Love is for the little, or for the weak and sentimental, or at best for equals, and for leisure. Authority wants clever servants, and brave soldiers, and a patient people who will pay taxes without ado; admiring, perhaps, the brilliant policy that has involved such outlay of men and money.

But lo, into our midst he comes who made us, who gave us every power and possession. Here is the King of kings and Lord of lords; the supreme Ruler of angels and of princes, of peoples, and of all principalities and powers. If men make such demands on fellow-men, what shall he require? Listen to his voice: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart!"

Here we see the very heart of God. He is Love who speaketh thus, for only love holds love so dear; placing it not only in the forefront of the commandments, but making it the fulfilling of the law. Let us look into it with the eyes of the heart, until we feel the truth

of it. Only love seeks love ; only love wins love ; only love satisfies love. Here see the very nature of God. And here see our nature too. He who is our lawgiver is our maker, and he has exactly adapted us to the requirements of his law. Let this too sink down into our souls, stirring us ; our God who commands us, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," has given us every faculty we possess for this one end ; for this we are what we are, and where we are, and as we are. Heart and mind and soul and strength are made for this : to love God perfectly. Blessed be God for this. As much as the eye is made for seeing and the ear for hearing, so our whole nature is fitted and adapted to this one glorious end : to love God perfectly. Sin had wrought within us a horrible mischief, and left us with the curse of the deceiver upon us, "Ye shall be as gods ;" and self had come to be the poor low object of all our love, the aim of all our life. But now we are redeemed, bought back, and set free for God again ; and all the great work of our salvation leads us right on and up to this : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

As we look into these words let us earnestly ask for the Holy Spirit's help. To talk coldly about the outermost things, the fringe of our Master's robe, were a shame to us; but to be cold and dull when we muse on such a subject as this were a shame and a sin indeed. Come, blessed Spirit, and shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and through and through us let us know this truth!

This is the first and great commandment, because all else flows from it. First, not only because God is what he is, but also because we are what we are; for what are we but little children, bewildered with the mysteries about us: whence things come, and whither they go, and what they mean? Puzzled by the alphabet of things, what can we know of the Almighty, of his ways, and of his works? But, though it cannot understand, the little child can love; love with a perfect trust and joy and thankfulness. Oh! can we ever hope to know God? Can we ever worthily reverence him? Can we ever serve him as do the angels that excel in strength? But we can love him, and this is what he asks. And this is the beginning of all knowledge and of all

service. It is only when I see that I can love God that I can come to him and serve him at all. Tell me of his holiness—how just and righteous he is—and I can but hide myself in fear. Tell me of his wisdom—how he spieth out my guilt and knoweth my hiding-place—and I despair. Tell me of his almighty power, and what can I say? “Let not God speak to me lest I die.” But tell me that he asks my love, then I draw near to him, sure that he loves me. And when once I know his love, all that God is, all that God can be, stands about me to complete my blessedness. His holiness is but the purity of his love—the pledge of his faithfulness. His power is but the mighty arm that doth encompass me. His wisdom is but the tender care that reads my every want. Tell me that he asks my love, then I can come near to him, wondering, unworthy, yet to take him as my own, and to give myself to him. So all true religion at once grows out of this first and great commandment and leads up to it; reverence, trust, obedience, love, joy, peace, all begin here.

Let us set this commandment before us in its exceeding greatness. It is a command-

ment. Do not think of it as a privilege that some few may be able to enjoy, but for most of us only a point up toward which we are to aim. Here is the law of the Lord by which we are already judged, a law which stretches back over all the past of our lives ; the standard by which every aim and desire and effort, every word and every deed is measured. Here is the great first commandment.

Do not put it away from you as hopeless and unattainable. Do not try to bring it down to some poor rendering which makes this word mean nothing. Here it stands in the might of its authority : "Thou"—it comes to each of us away by ourselves ; "thou shalt love"—it claims the innermost being for God ; "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart"—it claims every desire and every delight ; "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength"—it claims for God every thing that is within us ; every power and possibility of our nature.

And how do we meet this great commandment ? Think how dreadfully possible, how easy, it is for us to be religious with an exact and constant round of religion that has no

breath of love in it. Well may we tremble and fear. How readily we slip into the loveless round of prayer and service! We are trained to religious habits; we are surrounded by influences that tend to outward forms of devotion; how often and how easily these may be put in place of the real living heart union with the Lord! Or, indeed, our religion may be another and worse form of selfishness—a seeking to save myself, and securing for myself in this world and the next as much happiness as I can. All this may be without a glow or throb of real love to the Lord; blind to the beauties of the Altogether Lovely; never even thinking of the close and abiding communion and relationship into which God is ever seeking to bring us. Ah, and worst of all, how often does the religious life that begins in true love to God cool down and harden into a loveless, lifeless round of formalism!

Love—why, at its lowest it means that our hearts go out after him in eager desire. It means that we linger in his presence with a great delight. It means that we find our truest, purest, fullest joy in pleasing him, and

that we hold his favor as better than life. This is the great claim with which our God meets each of us. Think of this commandment going back over the whole life, in all its daily round, at home, in business, in pleasure, every-where, in every thing ; over the days of cold indifference, when we were too dull to hear the voice that called for us. Think of the great love from which this commandment flows met by our poor formalities, our heartless worship, our easy forgetfulness, our contented distance from our God ; and all the time this is what was possible to us and what was required of us : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

Consider earnestly how we are to keep this commandment.

As only love seeks so only love wins love. You cannot compel love by commanding it. God himself cannot make us love him by telling us to. Love will be slave to none. It cannot wear a fetter. Love is the God-like faculty within us ; of the high royalty of heaven, it yields only to love. Above all price, all command, never wrung by any threat or moved by any fear, love cannot be bound.

So God comes to us not with command only, he seeks our love in the only way in which it can be won. He reveals himself as the utterly lovable. Love has no other source or spring than this. We love him because he first loved us. There is only one way in which we come to love God. It is not by looking within and lecturing ourselves upon our duty. It is not by rules and exercises in the religious life. It is not by emotions and feelings into which we can force ourselves. It is possible for us to stir the heart to a flaming forth of strong desires, soon sinking down again into the smoking flax. But the even flow of true love to God can only come from knowing him as the Altogether Lovely. We must kindle our fire at the flame of his great love to us.

Do you remember the story in the old time, how Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel? He wanted to be king, but he knew that it was of no use to hire a score or two of fellows to blow a trumpet, and to hoist a flag, and to shout, "Absalom is king." You can't make kings by shouting. Thus Absalom set himself to be throned in the hearts of the men of Israel: Rising up early in the morning,

he stood in the gateway of the city there, in the fresh and dewy dawn, handsome, noble-looking, arrayed so as to set himself off to most advantage. Then, when any man came up from the country seeking a hearing from the king, forth came Absalom, and met him in the gateway with kindly greeting, and asked him how he was, and as to why he came; and as the countryman told his tale Absalom would sigh sadly, and look grieved on his account—"Ah, my friend, I only wish that I were king, I would see you righted." "I wish you were, sir, with all my heart," said the plain man from the country, thinking that he had never seen such a pleasant gentleman before. And when the man went home again he told of his kindness and of the gracious words, spreading his good opinion of Absalom. So did the prince day after day, week after week, month after month, until he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. Then when the trumpet was blown thousands were ready at once to rally round his standard, and all the people went with him to make him king.

A contrast as well as an illustration; forth to us there cometh one sent of the Father's

love, the Only Begotten, full of truth and grace. He meeteth us in the gate with kindly greeting. He asketh kindly concerning our welfare. Never was there one so brotherly. And lo ! when he hath heard the story of our sin and grief and shame and fear, he giveth us not words of good-will only, and vain wishes ; he showeth us how that he hath stood in our place ; how that he hath borne our sins in his body on the tree ; how that he by the grace of God hath won for us a free pardon ; and he bringeth us, accepted, into the presence of the King, and giveth us ten thousand glorious promises of blessedness in his presence and at his right hand.

Ah, it is in sight of the cross that love is born. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. Herein is love : not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is in tarrying here and gazing upon this wondrous love, and musing upon it, that the fire of our love is enkindled.

Only love satisfies love, is another precious truth for us. His love will hold very dear the poor offering of our lives and service. What

love touches it turns to more than gold. Have you ever thought, in all the world's eagerness for wealth, its conflicts and crowds, its hoarded gains, its coveted possessions, its pride and glitter and show, what are earth's most treasured possessions? Is it not this: the love of some faithful heart; the simple, quiet ways of love to greet one, day by day; the prattle of the little child—ah, and, even more sacredly treasured—a lock of hair, a faded portrait, a bit of work enriched by the touch of a vanished hand? The mite from the hand of love can buy all the costly gifts of the treasury. Poor, empty, worthless is the best service that we can give to our God; but if it spring from love, and if his love accept it, then his love makes much of it, and holds it very dear. Our broken service is presented in love's casket, and in that the least is very much. Let his love embolden thy love. It is the God of love who gives the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart."

But, blessed and helpful as this is, it is not enough. There is but one way in which we can keep this commandment. It is not graven

upon a granite stone, in hard, sharp letters. There is One who has fulfilled the law; who is ever fulfilling it; and he comes to dwell in us, to be in us the Life as well as the Truth. It is in taking the Lord Jesus as our strength for obedience that we learn to keep the law.

Reach out the hand of faith again; he is our Saviour from the weakness, the coldness, the fickleness of our nature. This life of perfect love is ours when we receive the Lord Jesus, the living Saviour, as come to fulfill the law in us and through us.

As God's love is the source of our love, so it is the pattern of our love. We love him because he loved us. See to it that it is love like his; of the same nature though not of the same degree; as the sun is imaged in the dew-drop. God's love is never a mere feeling, it is not a pity only, a sympathy. It flows forth in blessing; it is ceaselessly active. Here is the nature of all true love, its essence. God so loved the world that he gave—love must give; that he gave his only-begotten Son—love must give its best and dearest, its all; that we should not perish, but have everlasting life;—love cannot rest till it has secured

the safety and blessedness of the beloved. Such is the love wherewith we must love him. Beware of mere emotions and desires, and vague longings and sentimental dreamings. Love that is only a feeling is but a name. Let us not love in word only, but in deed and in truth. Here are three marks that must distinguish our love, or it is but an empty thing.

To love God with all the heart is to delight in pleasing him.

God's love to us leads him to bend over us, making all things work together for good, and leading us on to the fullness of blessedness at his right hand. The heaven of love is in the joy of the beloved. Its hell is in the beloved's grief. Loving God with all the heart is to set his will before us as our joy, and by all things and in all things to please him; it is to hate sin with a great abhorrence, because it hath slain him who is our dearest friend and Saviour. Trying to do the little things of life in such a way as to please him, bearing what we must bear, sharing what we can share, helping all, forgiving all, denying ourselves, holding and using all things as from him and for him—sacred alike in their origin and purpose—this

is to love God with all the heart, this is what God commands. Our obedience is to come flowing up from this well-spring. We love the Father, and as he gives us commandment even so we do.

To love God with all the heart is to delight most of all in his presence. Here, too, God's love is the pattern for ours. His great love cannot rest until it has gathered all his children about him in peace and joy. When God's love could flow unhindered into the world, this is the scene that meets us; Paradise, wherein the Father comes to walk and talk with his child. Then there is the fall, with its separation from God and the being driven forth. But slowly love works on, undoing the sin, until we reach the last picture in the Book of Life. There the heavenly Father has gathered the children at home again in the Father's house. He must have their presence; they go out no more forever. There his love welcomes them with all blessedness; they hunger no more, neither thirst any more. It is only when the Father's arms have clasped the son to his heart, and brought him home in safety, that there comes the merry-making and the great joy.

And this love God asks from us; to love him so as to make his presence a delight. The highest heaven is to be more than gold and gems, fruits and streams. The fullness of joy is at his right hand, the blessedness for evermore is in his presence.

And, lastly, to love God with all the heart is to hold ourselves and all we are as belonging to him. This is love's unfailing character, that it has nothing of its own. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. That was the proof of love. And this is always the true love-token, the token of true love; it will spare nothing for the blessedness of those that it loves with the whole heart. And to love God with all the heart is to hold ourselves and all we have—family, home, property, good name, health, reason, life, influence, talents, time—all stamped with the crest and motto of heaven. The cross is graven thereon, and underneath the legend, "We are not our own; we are bought with a price."

CHAPTER XI.

REST.

“He maketh me to lie down.”—PSA. xxiii, 2.

“I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.”—EZEK. xxxiv, 15.

“MAKETH me to lie down.” If there is any one thing that a sheep can do for itself, surely it is just that—lying down. A sheep may want feeding; it may want leading; it may need to be delivered out of the hand of many enemies; it may need bringing back to the fold; but, lying down—surely it is able to do that for itself!

Ah, so we think, and so we never come to the Lord for this great gift and grace. And all the time it is the Lord's own secret, which he keepeth ever to himself. The sheep are always seeking to lie down, and they cannot. The world is always trying to find this power, but in vain. The tempter would sell almost any thing in his realm if he could but buy

this knowledge—how to make his sheep lie down.

I was leaning over a gate one day watching the flock as they rested in the green pastures. "When do your sheep lie down, shepherd?" said I. "Well," said he, "I don't know; I suppose it is when they have had enough."

Only the Lord can give his sheep that.

Presently there came the master of the flock. "When do your sheep lie down?" I asked. "Only when they are very comfortable," said he; and even as he spoke they rose up frightened, and hurried together for protection, because the dog was looking in at the gate.

Only the Lord can make his sheep lie down. And this is the first thing—not the last. "He maketh me to lie down," then "he leadeth me." Many of us have a private version of this Psalm which runs thus: He leads me until I am dreadfully tired, and then he lets me lie down for a little while. No! Listen to the sweet music of the song: He maketh me to lie down, then he leadeth me. Stay, timid soul; you think that to follow him means a panting journey across a desert place, foot-sore, thirsty, urged on by fear of the night and

beasts of prey, with the shepherd himself ever so far on before thee, and moving so quickly that thou, poor wearied one, canst scarce keep him in sight ! Oh, the worry, the burden, the fretting that religion is to many ! Rest ? no, indeed. It is a wearied effort, dragging tired steps forever up a steep hill and fearing that they will never get to the top ! Ah, before you take a step he would have you at rest with him. "Lie down, dear child," saith he ; "lie down ; my service is not weariness, but rest ; lie down, then ; when thy fears are gone to sleep and thou hast learned my love, then will I lead thee."

There is the same wonderful tenderness in the blessed Lord's own words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"—then "learn of me." "Rest first, and then I can teach thee," saith he.

See, into the school here comes the new scholar—a timid little fellow, with frightened eyes, looking round on all the clever boys and girls, wondering if he will ever get to know so much as they do ; burdened and bewildered by the maps and boards and all the signs of

learning that every-where look down so sternly on him, making him feel quite guilty at being so ignorant. So dull, so stupid as he feels himself, poor little lad, he wonders if he will ever get through the mysteries of the alphabet, or if he will ever get up the slippery heights of the multiplication table. Ah! see, here comes the gentle mistress, without book or cane, and draws the frightened little scholar to her side with pleasant smile and merry words, and begins to tell him a story, and makes him forget that he is at school; and then when he is at home with her she opens a book and teaches him a lesson without his ever guessing that he is learning any thing. This is just the blessed Master's own method. "Rest—then learn of me." Come and know first of all my patient gentleness and love, then I can teach thee; this first, not last. "He maketh me to lie down," then he leadeth me. He who hath not learned to rest hath not learned how to learn. He who knows not how he makes us to lie down knows not how to follow him.

Note well where the resting place is. Some time since I was driving across the Cornish

moors, when my friend who was with me pointed to a greener slope between the rocky hills. "My father owned some land here when I was a boy," said he, "and many a time I have ridden over these moors looking for the sheep; I generally found them on that slope." "Why there?" I asked. Then he showed me how that two high hills rose up and sheltered it from the north and east, and how that the slope faced the south, so that they found it warmer, and the early young green grass grew there.

Some time afterward that pleasant picture of the hills happened to come back to my mind, and I turned wondering as to where His flock finds its resting place. Very beautiful for situation is this twenty-third Psalm. The Psalm before it begins with that dreadful cry, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Here is the hill of Calvary, with its mocking crowd. They part his garments among them, and cast lots for his vesture.

His sheep have come over Calvary. They have passed under the cross. Behind them rises that hill which forever breaks the fierce blasts that would beat upon us. "Being justi-

fied by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ : " here is the calm, and overhead the blue sky where no storms gather. Then, immediately after the twenty-third Psalm, comes that which tells of the hill of Zion with its splendors and shouts of triumph. " Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of glory shall come in." So sheltered lies the flock of the good Shepherd, betwixt Calvary and heaven, shut in from the angrier blasts and dwelling in a land that looks toward the sunny south.

But many have come over the hill of Calvary who have never learned to lie down. The first essential of this blessed rest is an assurance of safety. The stranger startles the flock, the watch-dog frightens it, the howl of the wild beast scatters it in panting terror. The confidence of the first line is the key to all the gladness of the Psalm : " The Lord is my shepherd." The whole song is born of assurance. Fear strikes all dumb, as when the hawk wheels overhead in the blue heavens and hushes instantly the music of the groves. Doubt spoils it all—" the little rift within the

lute." Confidence, steadfast, unwavering confidence, is the very heart of this rest. There must be a great, deep, abiding conviction wrought into us that he is mine, and I am his.

The sheep is a very timid creature, easily frightened; it must trust fully before it can rest at all. Think of the sheep that is not quite sure whether it belongs to the shepherd or not! May it eat of the pasture? And it ventures to snatch a doubtful nibble and looks up like a guilty thing. It hears the lion's roar, and bleats piteously, afraid that it has no helper. That sheep will not lie down.

It scarcely needs any argument to prove that this full assurance of faith is meant for all of us. Doubt undoes all that He can give. It is not too much to say that he does not give us anything unless we can be sure that it is ours. What if one who calls himself my friend should ask me to his house, and welcome me with many words, and entertain me with sumptuous show of hospitality, and give me a thousand tokens of his regard. He bids me make myself at home, and hopes I shall be comfortable; but as I am going to rest, he

takes me aside. "This is a pleasant house, isn't it?"

"Very, indeed," say I; "most pleasant. The design and arrangements are perfect, the views are charming, the gardens delightful; every thing is complete."

"I am glad you like it; I hope you will rest well;" and then his voice sinks to a whisper, "but there is just one thing I ought to mention: we are not quite sure about the foundations."

"Then, sir," I say indignantly, "you may depend upon it I am not going to stay here."

Sleep! I couldn't. Why, the man's welcome to the place is cruel; the entertainment is a hideous mockery; the decorations and furniture are a madman's folly. No; give me some poor cottage with many discomforts, but where I do know that the foundations are right, and I should be much better off.

Be quite sure that the blessed Lord hath this gift for each of us—this golden clasp of all his gifts. "In whom ye also trusted," says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation;" but that is not all: "in whom

also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of our inheritance." This blessed confidence toward God is a part of the gospel of our salvation. Go and ask for it boldly. Seek it confidently. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

Yet, note well, it is not what I am, but what he is, which is the source of confidence. This assurance, which is rest, comes from the character of the Shepherd. "He maketh me to lie down." A weak, or careless, or unskillful shepherd could not make his sheep rest in such blessed safety. The confidence which lies down sings of him, "He is my Shepherd, he leadeth me, I shall not want."

Power, wisdom, love, these are the three great gifts and qualifications of the good shepherd. Power to defend and to deliver; wisdom to select and to guide and to restore; love that never wearies, never forsakes, never turns aside forgetful of the flock. With us

the shepherd is above all a man of peace ; but as he appears in the East it is as a strong man armed. He goes forth with his sheep as one who goes to war. A long gun is slung from the shoulder, a dagger and heavy pistols are thrust in the belt, and a light axe or iron-headed club in the hand. He must be as brave as he is strong, for often he has to fight with savage beasts of prey, as David did ; and when the robber band comes the good shepherd does battle for his flock, and sometimes loses his life in guarding them.

Come then, timid soul, think of the might of thy Shepherd. Well may we lie down at rest in the keeping of such a one as he is. Hear how Isaiah sings of his greatness :

“ He shall feed his flock like a shepherd : he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, . . . and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in the balance ? . . . It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers ; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out

as a tent to dwell in. . . . Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. . . . Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that . . . the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."

How safe are they for whom he cares! With what assurance of safety can they lie down in the blessedness of his keeping!

Then beside this description of his power set the picture of his love as we have it from himself:

"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. . . . I am the good shepherd, . . . and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Look up to him, timid soul—was there ever such a one as he is? For me he hath laid down his life. He hath bought me with a price—the price of his own precious blood. So dear am I to his heart. And now with all his power he comes to care for me, and to lead me and deliver me. Here can I rest in blessed safety; “he maketh me to lie down.”

Then further needful to this rest is the constant presence of the shepherd. Many have but a dead Christ. He has laid down his life for them, and in his death they find their deliverance. Many have a far-off and glorified Christ, who is gone away up the high hill of Zion. These cannot rest. What of his power and his love if he is gone away? What of that life if it only lit the world with its blaze of glorious brightness eighteen hundred years ago, and left to all the ages but the fading after-glow of the better times? If that is all, then call not the Church a bride; she is a widow indeed! Yet there is a kind of thought, not uncommon among Christians, that Christ has gone away, and sent the Holy Spirit to take his place. Is it so? “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away,

the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." But why? "That ye may be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your heart." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world!" The blessed Spirit comes to enlighten the eyes of the heart that we may see him always, to open the ears of the heart that we may hear his voice and follow him, to bring us into a communion with him, constant, unbroken, more real, more intimate than was possible so long as he was here in his bodily presence. Now it is ours to know and to rejoice in the largest fulfillment of that ancient promise, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

Our rest is in the complete abandonment of ourselves to him. He is mine, and I am his. He altogether mine, and all that he is, all that he has, all that he can be, and all that he can do, mine. And I altogether his. Out into all the past goes the hush of his gracious forgiveness, breathing over it a peace that cannot be broken. Close over me he standeth with his tender whisper, "Fear not;" ever

caring for me, and caring for me in every thing. On into the unknown he looketh. He planneth all, he provideth, he leadeth. So, compassed about with his favor as with a shield, "he maketh me to lie down."

CHAPTER XII.

TRUST, THE SECRET OF REST.

MY old college chum had dropped in to spend the evening with me—a jaunty, light-hearted fellow. We used at one time to meet daily, he having nothing particular to do, and I glad to have the loneliness of those days broken by his genial laugh and ready flow of conversation. But our ways had gone farther and farther apart, and though there was still all the old friendliness, yet there were few matters on which we touched with a common interest. As for me, burdened with the care of a large district in a very poor neighborhood, my life was spent in trying to help many in a fierce struggle against want and temptation; trying to arouse such a struggle in others who had never found any heart or hope to begin it, and in others still who had lost all the heart and hope with which they had once begun.

We sat together forgetful of the time, for it

was an evening to enjoy an hour or two beside the fire ; and it was pleasant to live over again the old times and to trace the histories of companions and rivals in class lists and games.

Then our conversation turned to more serious matters. Outside was a blustering winter's night, with howling wind and beating rain, and we drew near the fire pitying the homeless and unsheltered, and wishing all the world could share the cosy comfort of my hearth.

So the hours flew by until in upon us boomed the tones of the old cathedral clock as it struck twelve, swelling louder on an angry burst of wind, then faintly dying.

"I must be off," said my friend, springing up from the depths of the easy-chair. "I didn't think it was so late."

We lingered, standing in the hall to have another word about the matter we had been discussing, he thrusting himself into his great-coat while I talked. Then he stood at the door, and had the last word of the argument.

"No, no," said he ; "better no God at all than a belief in hell. Good-night !"

Then the door was opened, and he stepped out into the blustering darkness.

I shut the door with bolt and chain, and came back and sat by the fire. The words went ringing on in my mind, "Better no God at all than a belief in hell." And with them came back the thought of other words that he had spoken, plainly but not unkindly: "You accept a tradition, and are afraid to face what would disturb your creed;" "You belong to a set, and drift with them in this as in other things;" "Your life is so taken up in the hard practical matters of daily life that these distant and dreadful theories find no room in your thoughts."

There were many answers that lay on the surface. My friend, too, belonged to "a set," as he called it; a set with whom religion was mostly a thing of tradition, or of argument only; at least I knew that he had neither opportunity nor care to search into the matter as I had tried to do. The Bible was to him somewhat old-fashioned, and he was somewhat impatient of its being summoned in evidence. "There are new lights," he said, "in which the age must read and interpret that

book." But the matter was far too deep and serious to be the mere subject of a logical conflict. It pressed upon my own soul, and demanded the answer that should satisfy my innermost conviction.

"What attitude of rest or peace can any man find who holds a belief in hell?" he had asked.

"I can't tell you," I answered. "But there is such an attitude, and I think I have found it."

"No," said he, confidently; "indifference, indolence, blindness, sleep, are the only things that make that possible."

"There is another, stronger and better than these," I had said: "a simple trust in God."

Then as the fierce wind howled and moaned at the window, the chilling words of his reply swept over me again: "Better no God at all than a belief in hell." My New Testament lay within reach of me, and I took it up and turned over its pages.

"I certainly accept this as the word of God," I said to myself, "and how can I do any thing else? I find here One whom I cannot but

love, and trust, and delight to reverence and serve as my Father. I find in its pages not a dead history, but a living Friend and Brother, who knows me as no other does, and who meets me in closest heart communion. I see him stooping to the lowest depth of poverty and sorrow, enduring every agony and shame that he may help men. In him all my power of trust rests with an unutterable confidence. I find in him the noblest, truest life of which I can conceive. I find in him a power that helps me to be like him in spite of my coarse selfishness. And in seeking to follow in his steps I find myself living a higher life than I can live in any other way. That nobody can make me doubt.

“And yet, and yet,” I said to myself, cautiously feeling for any way of escape that there might be, “I find in this same word, and from these gracious lips, utterances dark and terrible. He never spake harshly. He never spake hastily. He never stooped to invent any terrors by which to frighten men into being good. Yet he warns men of a wrath to come, and speaks of an everlasting punishment. Can I, dare I, brush all these aside lightly?

Or shall I accept the word and trust him to make it clear by and by?"

My Testament had opened at the page which of all others was perhaps most thumbed, and my eyes fell on the text that I had underlined and surrounded with references:

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Yes, God was to me the infinitely good. Not one lay outside his love. Not one in all the world but that great love encompassed, like God's own air and sunshine. To me it would be the veriest hell to give up faith and trust in him. Life would then become the dreariest loneliness—a helpless burden, a hopeless struggle. Existence itself would have neither promise nor meaning.

"No; nothing is better, nothing can be better than a whole-hearted trust in God," I said aloud.

"Indifference, indolence, blindness," my friend had said. "Was it so?" I asked myself. "Was there some deficiency in me, some unsuspected hardness, grim and dread-

ful, from which my friend was freed? a horrible stony indifference to the fate of the lost?" That could scarcely be. My friend himself was of all men the one who most often and most fiercely blamed me for my folly in sacrificing myself, as he said, "for such a hardened lot." My rooms, my position, my income, all were proof enough—perhaps more proof than I always cared for—that I loved my neighbor at least with a love that was not in word only.

Again the storm burst with a fury that shook the house, and that moaned and howled about the place, and in upon me came the words, as if it were the message of the storm, "Better no God at all than a belief in hell."

Then I sat thinking, wondering, questioning, till I fell asleep and dreamed. . . .

I was passing through a city where the people stood in knots and talked of some horrible outrage and murder. Men and women gathered at the narrow entry of their courts and told indignantly the rumors of the crime. Then I passed the building where the judge was sitting to try the prisoner whose case stirred all the city.

It was pleasant to get away from these dark

things, outside the city gates—pleasant to leave the noise and crowd, and all the signs of this black crime. So I went on until before me lay a garden in all the rich beauty of the spring.

Under the shade of a tree, its old twisted branches just tipped with the dainty young green leaves, sat a little maiden of some ten years arranging a bunch of flowers. She was singing gayly, staying a moment to turn the nosegay round and look at it, then singing on again as she took up another violet or primrose, and put in here and there a leaf of ivy or a fern. The light fell in between the young leaves in sunny patches on the mossy trunk of the tree, and touched the little maiden's hair with gold.

Then on his way there came one of the servants, who carried a scythe in his hand. He crossed the lawn and set the scythe against the tree, and there he stayed watching the busy fingers and listening to the maiden's merry song. A sneer curled his lip and a dark frown gathered on his face as he stooped and picked a daisy and slowly pulled out its petals one by one, letting them fall at his feet. He

leaned forward so that his shadow fell over her, and with a harsh voice that startled the singer he said,

“Do you know what your father is going to do?”

“No,” said the little maiden, turning the sunny face up toward him. “What is he going to do?”

Then with a voice more harsh and grating, and a darker frown,

“Going to hang that poor man that he tried in the court to-day,” said the servant.

“Hang him!” she said, as the hands fell down at her side and the sunshine died. And she looked up with wondering eyes and parted lips.

“Yes, going to hang him,” said the man, putting his rough fingers grimly to his throat. “Going to put a rope, a hard rope that will hurt him dreadfully, right round his neck, and hang him.”

“My father is going to?” cried the little maiden, bewildered.

“Yes, your father,” sneered the servant.

Her cheek grew crimson and her eyes flashed fire. “My father *never* would!” she

said indignantly, rising up and letting the flowers fall unheeded to the ground.

“You will see, then,” said the servant. “I heard them say it myself.”

The sun was hidden; the blue sky gone behind a bank of stormy cloud. The wind rose in fierce gusts howling about the garden, sweeping before it the fallen flowers. The little maiden with bitten lips and angry face went in and sat down in her room.

“I am sure my father never, never would,” she said.

Then she leaned at the window and looked out over the garden. Beyond the walls rose the roofs of the grim prison. Slowly the anger died out, and all the face grew sad. With hands that hung down helplessly, and tearful eyes, she said to herself, “My father going to hang that poor man! to hang him! He never could!” And the indignation touched her yet again for a moment, but almost at once it turned to grief. “And yet, and yet—poor man! And my father going to hang him! O, why are there such dreadful things as prisons and, and—” she shuddered now and could not say the word.

"Poor man!" she said, "and he is only over there, and my father is going to—to hang him! My father!"

And so she stood and looked out sorrowing. The sun was going down in a lurid sky. Great masses of black cloud hung overhead. The darkness just parted to show a blood-red streak shaped like a sword. The wind moaned and howled about the corners of the old house.

"How dreadful!" sighed the little maiden to herself; "my father going to hang him! Poor, poor man!" . . .

Then I saw myself in a large room where a grave man sat at dinner. A face noble and generous, that one could trust assuredly at once, with firmness and strength and earnestness in every look and tone and word, and over all a great benevolence. Beside him a chair was set, and plate and knife and fork, and as he finished dinner he turned to the servant.

"Where is the little mistress to-night?" he asked. "Isn't she well?"

Then presently in came the little maiden. She who was used to greet her father with

the sunny face and many words of welcome came, sad and with slow steps, without a word.

“What is the matter, little one?” said the father, holding out his hand to her.

She took the hand and looked up in the father’s face almost reproachfully. And then with a great sob and eyes that brimmed with grief,

“Father, you are not going to—to hang him, are you? Poor, poor man!”

Then the father’s face grew sad as the maiden’s own, and he laid the little head against himself and put his arm about her. Only the wind moaned at the window; not another sound was heard for some minutes. Then the father stroked the hair tenderly, and he turned the face up toward himself.

“My child,” said he, “can you trust me?”

She looked up at him, and as she looked her whole face seemed to say, “What else could I do?” She put her arm about his neck.

“Yes, father,” she said, “of course I can.”

“Trust me to do what is right and kind

and good?" he asked, still stroking her hair tenderly.

"Yes," said the maiden, laying her head against him as if she could rest there.

"Then trust me still," said he, "and one day you will understand." . . .

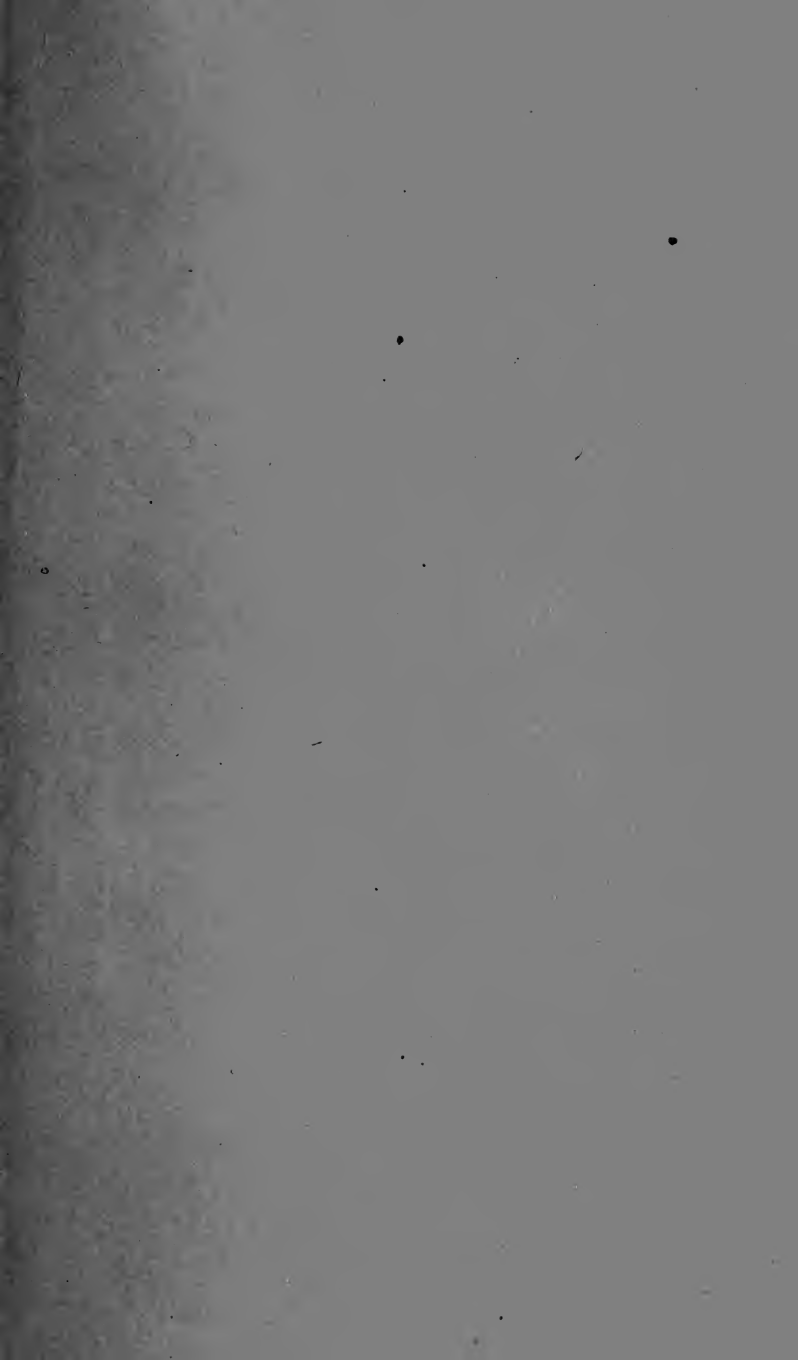
And then I awoke and thought of our childhood; and I thought of faculties that may develop in us too, and reconcile a thousand things such as perplex and trouble.

"Thank God," said I, "I am content to be a child; to trust and wait."

THE END.







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